

ASK THE EXPERT



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Dr. Nicholas Massa is Vice President of Medical Affairs for Clinical Services at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield. He is board certified in pediatrics and practiced general pediatrics in Central New York for nearly 20 years. Dr. Massa is also a member of the Advisory Council for the Golisano Children's Hospital in Syracuse, the Onondaga County Pediatric Society, Onondaga County Medical Society, and Medical Society of the State of New York.

COVID-19 Booster Shots and Flu Shots: Double Down on Protection

Flu season is here again, and the COVID-19 pandemic is still with us. Vaccines offer crucial protection against both of these diseases. But should you get your COVID-19 booster shot or your flu shot first – or can you get them together? We talked to Dr. Nicholas Massa, Vice President of Medical Affairs at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield to find out the answer to this question and more.

Q. Can I still get my flu shot this year if I get a COVID-19 booster shot?

- ✔ **Yes! Getting your yearly flu shot reduces your risk for flu-related illness and potentially serious complications.** Likewise, if a COVID-19 booster is recommended for you, getting it may help shore up your protection against severe COVID-19 illness and death. The good news is that you don't have to pick between the two types of vaccines. You can get both.

Q. Do I need to wait for a certain period of time between the two vaccines?

- ✔ **There's no need to space them out. In fact, if you are due for both shots, you can get them at the same visit.** Just don't delay your flu shot too long if a COVID-19 booster isn't recommended for you at this time. Ideally, you should get your flu shot by the end of October.

Q. Will the side effects be worse if I get both shots at the same visit?

- ✔ **This is a new situation, but we have lots of experience giving other vaccines together.** That experience has shown that the side effects are generally about the same whether the vaccines are given alone or at the same time. If you have concerns, talk with your health care provider.

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Q. But flu season wasn't bad last year, Dr. Massa. Do I really need a flu shot this year?

- ✔ **You're right—the level of flu virus activity was unusually low last flu season.** That may have been partly because people were wearing masks, social distancing, and staying home a lot due to COVID-19 restrictions. This year, people are mingling more, which means that flu viruses have more chance to circulate. Getting your flu shot remains very important.



Q. I've heard there could be a new option on the way that combines the COVID-19 booster and the flu vaccine in a single shot. When will that be available?

- ✔ **Moderna has announced that it is working on a combination shot, but it is still in development.** For now, you still need two separate shots.

Q. How will the Delta variant of COVID-19 impact this flu season?

- ✔ **It is possible to have flu and COVID-19 at the same time.** The highly contagious Delta variant that is going around might make this even more likely – and it's something you definitely want to avoid. There is growing evidence that having COVID-19 and the flu together increases the risk for severe illness and death. That's a compelling reason to get vaccinated against both.

The information in this document is current as of November 9, 2021. For the latest information on COVID-19, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention online at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

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