



State of Missouri Team Members,

As a physician, nearing autumn reminds me it is time to encourage everyone to get their flu shot. This year, flu season has weighed much heavier on my mind. My concern started well before the 100-degree days have begun to fade out. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more important to get your flu shot.

In a typical year, over 100,000 Missourians become sick from the flu. Many Missourians of all ages become seriously ill and some end up in hospitals. The flu takes 100s of lives here every year.

Just like in past years, you help defend yourself from the flu. You are also less likely to spread the virus to those around you. It has also been shown to cause symptoms to be more mild if you are infected. While the effectiveness of the vaccine varies from year to year, some protection is better than none at all.

Yes, all of this is true every year. So how does COVID-19 impact the flu season?

To ensure our state has the capacity to manage COVID-19 patients, we need to do whatever we can to prevent strain on our doctors' offices and hospitals. Flu vaccines are therefore important to the COVID-19 fight. Preventing flu means fewer unnecessary medical visits and hospitalizations. Preventing flu also reduces disruptions to our daily lives – at home, at work, at school. It's also still unknown how a person could be affected by experiencing both viruses at the same time.

Symptoms of flu and COVID-19 significantly overlap one another. This means preventing outbreaks of the flu will help us all keep our focus on getting to the other side of the pandemic. Until COVID-19 can be ruled out as one's diagnosis, a person suffering from the flu will likely be cared for as if they have COVID-19 which requires stricter measures.

In a typical year, fewer than half of adults in Missouri get a flu shot. This year, we need to do better.

Flu shots are already starting to become available, and we encourage anyone who can get it to get theirs soon. There is already much uncertainty surrounding us due to COVID-19, so let's not allow the flu to become a competing concern.

As Governor Parson has emphasized, we can fight COVID-19. Getting a flu shot is one more way to keep us healthier and reduce the strain on our health care system.

For more information, visit our website at [health.mo.gov/flu](https://health.mo.gov/flu).

In good health,

Dr. Randall Williams

DHSS Director

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