

NJ AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Flu Vaccines Are Important for People with HIV**  
People with HIV Are at Higher Risk for Serious Flu Illness

Like other groups at higher risk of developing serious flu-related complications, people with chronic medical conditions like HIV should get a flu shot every year to prevent severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths related to complications of the flu. The flu shot is even more important for people with HIV who are not taking prescribed medicine to treat HIV (called [antiretroviral therapy](#), or ART). Untreated HIV significantly weakens a person's immune system by gradually destroying the body's ability to fight infection and certain cancers.

Being vaccinated for the flu provides the best protection against flu this season. People with HIV have a greater chance of not only getting the flu but also other bacterial or viral infections. Pneumonia often occurs among people with HIV who are sick with the flu. Since flu activity is high during the winter, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends that everyone, including groups at higher risk of complications, get their flu shot at the beginning of fall, ideally by the end of October.

Although it is impossible to eliminate all risks of the flu, there are proven action steps a person can take to lower their chance of getting sick with the flu and to prevent other flu-related illnesses.

- **Get a Flu Shot:** Although it's recommended that everyone get a flu shot early in flu season, it is never too late to get vaccinated. High-risk groups, including people with HIV, should only receive the injectable flu shot rather than the nasal spray form. Flu shots have been proven to reduce the length, symptoms, and complications of flu illness. Flu shots are often offered at no cost in many locations, including doctors' offices, health clinics, health departments, pharmacies, and by employers and schools.
- **Take Steps to Prevent the Flu:** Simple, everyday action steps can be incredibly helpful in stopping the spread of flu. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, and mouth) as germs easily spread this way, and stay

away from anyone sick, especially during the first few days of symptoms appearing. If you are not feeling well, do not go to work, school, or other public gatherings.

- **Speak to Your HIV Care Provider at the First Sign of Symptoms:** People with HIV who have the flu or think they may have come in contact with the flu virus should contact their HIV care provider about starting antiviral medicines for flu. These prescription drugs can decrease the risk of developing severe flu complications when started as soon as symptoms begin. Although flu antivirals are safe to take with prescribed HIV prevention or treatment medicines, let your provider know which HIV medicines you're taking to avoid potential interactions between the prescribed drugs.

In addition to the flu shot, the CDC recommends other vaccines for people with HIV to help protect against serious and sometimes deadly illnesses. Talk with your HIV care provider about which vaccines are right for you. Other recommended vaccines include [COVID-19](#), [Hepatitis A](#), [Hepatitis B](#), [HPV](#), [Meningococcal](#) series, [Pneumococcal \(pneumonia\)](#), [Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis \(whooping cough\)](#), and [Zoster \(shingles\)](#).

For information and questions about HIV and other STIs ([Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)), contact the New Jersey AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline. Healthcare providers are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, to provide free and private help, including connecting callers to free sexual health services in New Jersey: 1-800-624-2377 or [Chat Here](#).

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#### **New Jersey AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline**

Healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses and pharmacists) provide telephone consultation for people seeking information about HIV/AIDS, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) including hepatitis. Callers receive information tailored to their needs; discussion about prevention, referrals for testing sites and other related services, counseling and testing locations, and information on treatment and adverse reactions to medications. The hotline is administered by the New Jersey Poison Control Center and funded by the New Jersey Department of Health, Division of HIV, STD, and TB services.

#### **Rutgers New Jersey Medical School**

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: [nims.rutgers.edu](https://nims.rutgers.edu).



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