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COLLEGE of
CARDIOLOGY®



How To Talk With Our Heart Patients About Adult Vaccinations

Leveraging the Cardiovascular Care Team's Role to Facilitate Timely Immunization

Routine vaccination is the most effective way to prevent infection and is associated with a decreased risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death from related complications, especially for those with cardiovascular and/or cerebrovascular disease. Influenza, for example, is associated with a higher risk of subsequent myocardial infarction and stroke. Yet, vaccination rates among adults and high-risk patient populations fall well short of public health goals, leaving many people vulnerable to serious morbidity and mortality from a host of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Cardiologists and other members of the cardiovascular care team are in a unique position to help educate patients about the importance of timely vaccination, including the cardiovascular risks of not getting or staying current with recommended immunizations. **Research shows that, above all else, patients are more likely to get a vaccine if their doctor or health care team recommends it.** Therefore, cardiologists and cardiology nurses, physician assistants, and pharmacists can serve as an essential advocate and referral source for timely vaccination.

This resource includes practical information and many best practices to enhance your conversations with patients about the importance of adult vaccines. **Together we can make a difference and improve vaccination rates among all our cardiology patients.**



Vaccines play a vital role in preventing serious, potentially fatal infectious diseases and protecting public health.

Yet **only 1 in 4 adults** have received recommended vaccines.



ONE EXAMPLE

Burden of Influenza and Benefits of Vaccination



Influenza carries a hefty burden for older adults, yet only half of U.S. adults get their annual flu shot, underscoring persistent and critical immunization gaps that can lead to greater morbidity, hospitalizations and increased health costs.

In fact, adults 65 and older account for:

- 50-70% of seasonal flu-related hospitalizations
- 70-85% of seasonal flu deaths

Research suggests that inflammation can continue after acute influenza infection and exacerbate cardiovascular disease and other chronic conditions.



Triggers
inflammation



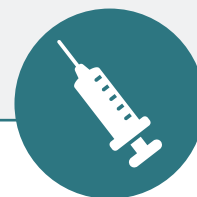
This inflammation can increase risk of serious illness, hospitalization and health setbacks



Inflammation of the blood vessels can exacerbate heart conditions and make heart attack or stroke more likely

Influenza vaccination among this population results in:

- Fewer hospitalizations:
 - Nearly 20% reduction for heart disease
 - 16-23% fewer for cerebrovascular disease
 - 29-32% fewer for pneumonia or influenza
- Fewer deaths:
 - **Up to 50% reduction in all-cause mortality**



Even if you don't administer vaccines on site, recommending vaccines – including when and where patients can find them – can help boost vaccination rates and prevent complications.

The likelihood of vaccination increased 11-fold for some vaccines after being recommended by a health care professional.

Source: National Association of County and City Health Officials' (NACCHO)

Influential Role of the Cardiovascular Care Team to Recommend and Refer Patients For Vaccination

People with cardiovascular disease are especially prone to complications from vaccine-preventable illnesses, including influenza, pneumonia, COVID, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Because no single care team or provider oversees or educates adult patients about vaccines, there is an urgent need for the cardiovascular care team to step up efforts to promote vaccination.

Having cardiovascular care teams being more central to vaccination efforts makes good sense. For many older patients with cardiovascular disease, their cardiology practice becomes their medical home, with multiple touchpoints throughout the year. But even younger patients should know about and heed vaccination recommendations; estimates are that more than half of Americans between 45 and 64 years old have some form of cardiovascular disease.

The American College of Cardiology (ACC) recommends routine vaccination for all people with cardiovascular disease, unless there is a contraindication. As such, cardiology care providers need to be equipped with information, tools and strategies to help:

- **Let patients know that vaccination throughout adulthood remains critical;** we do a pretty good job of promoting vaccines for children, but many adults don't know about the vaccines they need
- **Increase vaccine uptake** (when possible, cardiology practices can increase vaccination rates by stocking vaccines and communicating strong, positive messaging about recommended vaccines)
- **Educate about the risks of vaccine-preventable infections and the benefits of vaccination,** especially for people with heart disease or who have had a previous heart attack or stroke
- **Reduce misinformation** and information gaps (for example, explaining that you cannot get the infection from the vaccine)
- **Build vaccine confidence** (explaining how they work and that they are among the safest and most studied medicines)



Only half of cardiology practices stock and administer the flu vaccine. But all cardiology practices should reinforce the importance of getting a flu shot each year to help prevent related heart complications.



Many Heart Patients Aren't Aware of the Risks

According to survey data from the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID), there are marked gaps in awareness about the importance of annual flu vaccination and pneumococcal vaccination, and the risks and seriousness of these diseases.

Of patients with a heart condition:

- 36% were not advised about the potentially serious consequences of the flu
- Only 1 in 3 (32%) were recommended to get vaccinated against pneumococcal disease



Most people will get a vaccine when it is recommended. So take the time to discuss and recommend vaccines to your patients.

Potential Reasons For Persisting Gaps in Adult Vaccination Rates

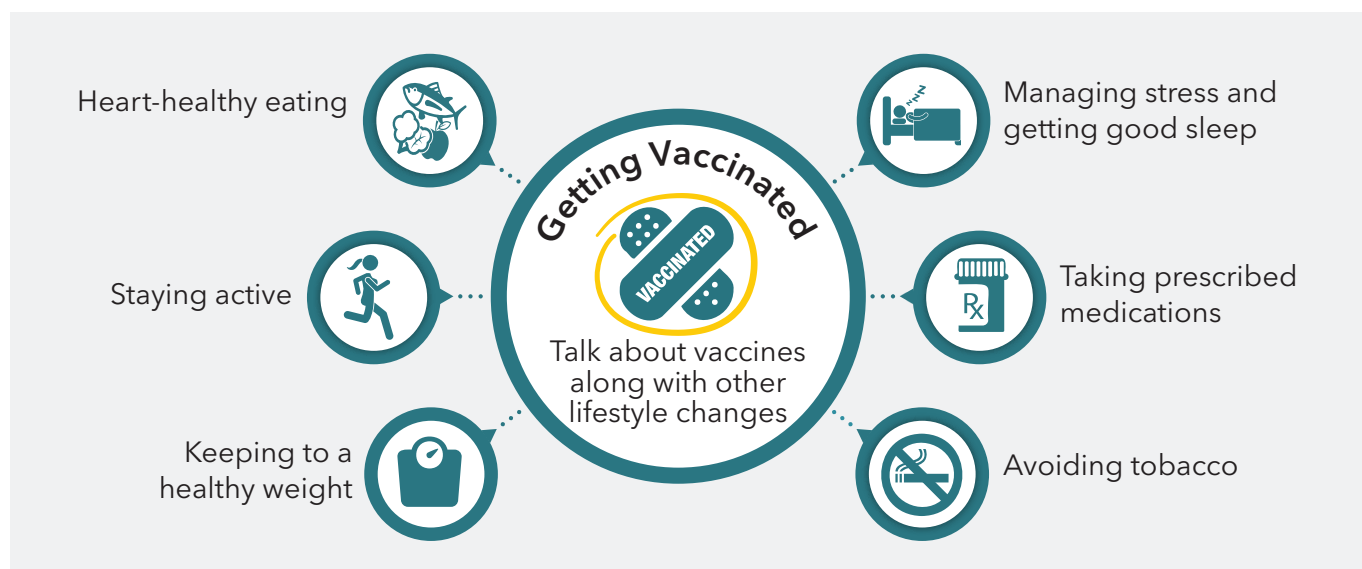


Low vaccination rates among adults may occur because:

- **They simply aren't recommended** by a health care provider – unlike with children's vaccines, often no single care team or provider oversees and educates adult patients about vaccines
- **There is generally a lack of awareness about which vaccines are recommended for them** – adult patients may not know about all the vaccines they need
- **Misinformation** (i.e. false beliefs about vaccines causing the disease they are intended to prevent, natural immunity, the risks of the vaccine vs. the disease if not protected)
- **Hesitancy** stemming from concerns over vaccine safety or effectiveness, or believing they are healthy and won't get sick

Changing the Dialogue – Integrating Vaccines Into Cardiovascular Care

Vaccination should be seen as an essential step that 1) people with heart disease can take to protect themselves and their heart health and 2) clinicians and care teams can recommend to keep their patients healthy. Take advantage of opportunities to talk with your patients about vaccines as a part of healthy living.





Research also shows that “presumptive communication” works – that is, going into a conversation expecting the desired behavior (in this case getting vaccinated) – and can positively influence behaviors.

Research shows that it helps to:

- **Put risks into context.** Explain that the disease a vaccine is trying to prevent is potentially very harmful, especially for someone with cardiovascular disease. Some people need hospital care and some even die. Vaccines are safe. They help keep you healthy and can prevent serious illness immediately after the infection – and also farther down the line.
- **Tell patients that a vaccine is ready and waiting or reserved for them, which can encourage people to get vaccinated.** For example, “you can get your vaccine at your pharmacy.”
- **Link vaccination to other benefits.** Compared with other messages, explaining that flu vaccination may also prevent downstream cardiovascular events helped encourage more people to get vaccinated. Few patients understand that respiratory infections can cause heart problems. Highlighting these dangers seems to resonate and spark action for some.



Key Education Points and Opportunities




Refer to these education points to help relay important vaccine information in your interactions with patients and/or through reminders. You can also tailor messages to individual patients.

OBJECTIVE	REMINDERS/SUGGESTED LANGUAGE TO USE WITH PATIENTS
 <p>Educate patients about the dangers of vaccine-preventable diseases, and how having heart disease puts them at greater risk of complications following an infection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heart disease makes it harder to fight off infections, such as the flu, COVID and pneumonia. These diseases can also make existing heart problems worse and even lead to a heart attack or stroke. <div data-bbox="630 856 1421 1050"> <p>Scan the QR code for a video to share with your patients: “How Flu Affects Your Heart: Why Getting a Flu Shot is Important.”</p>  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting vaccinated against [name disease] can help you avoid serious illness and protect your heart too.



Be ready with tips for talking with patients, answers to frequently asked questions, and the key benefits of staying current with recommended vaccines. For tools to share with your patients, visit [CardioSmart.org/Vaccines](https://www.cardiosmart.org/Vaccines).

 <p>Recommend vaccination. Focus on the dangers of influenza, COVID, RSV, and other vaccine-preventable diseases and the safety and benefits of the vaccines in preventing the illnesses and related heart complications.</p>	<p>People often focus on concerns or fears about vaccines. Steer the conversation toward the dangers of the infection and the protection offered by vaccines. In short, vaccine-preventable diseases are bad and the vaccines used to prevent them or lessen their effects are good.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The [flu, COVID, pneumococcal] vaccine is especially important for people with heart disease, or who've had a heart attack or stroke. That's because there is a greater chance of getting seriously ill from these infections. That's true for younger people with heart disease too. • Vaccines are a simple, safe and effective way to help you avoid becoming seriously ill, and many can protect your heart too. <p>For flu:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Getting a flu shot lowers the chance of heart-related hospital stays. ◦ An annual flu vaccine may reduce the chance of a heart attack as much as taking statins, controlling your blood pressure or quitting smoking.
 <p>Explain that routine vaccination is as important as other choices they make to stay heart healthy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying up to date with recommended vaccines is an important part of healthy living. • Many vaccines can protect your heart just like other healthy choices, including eating well, staying active, not smoking, getting good sleep, and taking your heart medicines.

 <p>Address common questions and concerns without judgment.</p>	<p>Some examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vaccines are safe and among the most well-studied medicines, supported by decades of research and real-world use. 2. Side effects are usually mild and go away quickly. 3. You can't get the flu or COVID, RSV, or pneumonia from the vaccine. 4. Because the protection you get from vaccines declines or wanes over time, routine and repeat vaccination is needed. 5. Vaccines may not always keep you from getting sick, but they can make any illness milder and shorter in duration.
 <p>Incorporate time-sensitive reminders for certain vaccines as they become available as part of visit discussions.</p>	<p>For example, the ideal time for patients to get the flu shot is before flu season begins, ideally in October. If you don't offer the vaccine, urge patients to make an appointment at their pharmacy or with their primary care provider to get their vaccines.</p>
 <p>Educate patients that vaccination helps protect the individual and other people in the community too.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only do vaccines protect you by helping to teach your body's immune system to recognize and fight harmful germs, but by getting vaccinated you're also less likely to transmit or give the germs to others. • When more people in the community are vaccinated, it reduces the ability of the virus to spread (this is known as herd immunity).

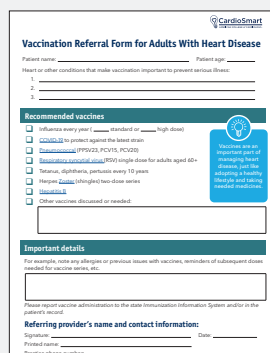


Vaccines Recommended For People With Cardiovascular Disease

Build in time during follow-up visits to ask your patients if they are up to date with these routine vaccines:

- Seasonal influenza vaccine
- Pneumococcal vaccine
- COVID vaccines and boosters
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) for people aged 60 and older
- Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis every 10 years
- Hepatitis B vaccines – recommended for all adults up through 59 years of age, and for some adults 60 and older with known risk factors
- Shingles (Herpes Zoster) vaccines – recommended for all adults 50 and older

Other vaccines may be needed depending on the patient's age, occupation or travel plans.



Vaccination Referral Form for Adults With Heart Disease

Patient name: _____ Patient age: _____
Heart or other conditions that make vaccination important to prevent serious illness:
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Recommended vaccines

☐ Influenza every year (_____ reminder or _____ high dose)
☐ COVID-19 vaccine against the latest strain
☐ Pneumococcal (PPSV23, PCV13, PCV20)
☐ Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) single dose for adults aged 60+
☐ Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis every 10 years
☐ Hepatitis B (HepB) two-dose series
☐ Shingles
☐ Other vaccines discussed or needed: _____

Important details

For example, note any allergies or previous issues with vaccines, reminders of subsequent doses needed for vaccine series, etc.

Please report vaccine administration to the state Immunization Information System and/or in the patient's record.
Referring provider's name and contact information:
Signature: _____ Date: _____
Printed name: _____
Practice phone number: _____

Use [ACC's vaccination referral form](#) to help reinforce the need to get the vaccine, similar to filling a medication or getting eyeglasses.

12 Ways to Increase Vaccination Rates Among Heart Patients



1. Recommend and encourage patients with heart disease to get necessary vaccines as part of cardiovascular disease management discussions and planning.

Although there are many strategies to increase vaccine uptake, **a strong recommendation to vaccinate from a clinician a patient trusts remains the leading motivator.** Tell your patients if and when they need the vaccine.

Statements similar to the following can be helpful:

- “Mrs. Jones. It’s that time of year, so you should get your [flu, pneumococcal, COVID] vaccine to help protect your heart.”
 - “I recommend that you get the flu shot each year. Not only can it protect you from getting really sick, but it can also help prevent a related heart attack or stroke. My family and I get one every year.”
 - “I recommend the latest COVID vaccine to help protect your heart. For nearly 1 out of 5 people, COVID can cause long-term health problems, including heart issues. Repeated COVID infections also can put you at greater risk of a heart attack.”
 - “I recommend that you get an RSV vaccine. Patients over 60 years old with heart disease or heart failure are at highest risk for severe RSV symptoms if they catch it. Getting the vaccine greatly reduces this risk.”
- “Heart disease can make it harder for the body to fight off infections. That means you’re more likely to get very sick. Getting your [vaccine] is a simple, safe and effective way to protect yourself against severe illness, and your heart will thank you too.”
- “Staying up to date with the vaccines you need can help your heart too – just like eating healthy foods, being active, not smoking, and taking your medications. That’s because many of the diseases that vaccines prevent can make heart conditions worse and even lead to heart attack or stroke.”
- “Vaccines not only protect you and your loved ones from getting sick, but they can help protect your heart too.”
- “A vaccine is reserved and waiting for you at _____. Make sure you get your vaccine today.”



2. Explain how vaccines work.

This often helps allay concerns. Use [*Have Heart Disease? Get the Vaccines You Need to Stay Healthy*](#) handout with your patients.



3. Tailor your message based on what matters to individual patients.

Use motivational interviewing to engage patients and understand what is most important to them to tailor your message and meet patients where they are. Also make sure to provide culturally sensitive and easy-to-understand information, as appropriate.



4. Know where to refer patients to get vaccines when needed or when they become available.

If your practice doesn't stock and administer vaccines, establish referral relationships with vaccine providers in your area and keep a list of vaccine providers handy to give to patients.



If your practice administers vaccines, consider sending notices when a vaccine is in and available for patients.

For example:



Primary care or other practices involved in the patient's care that might give vaccines



Hospital or health care system vaccine clinics



Local pharmacies



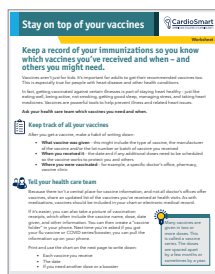
Workplaces



Local public health departments or community centers



5. Determine the best way to document receipt of vaccines in the patient's medical record.



Keeping an accurate immunization record is important.

You can offer patients the [*Stay on Top of Your Vaccines*](#)

worksheet as a starting point. It can help them keep a record of their immunizations. It also lists vaccines recommended for most people with heart disease.

Find it and other tools at [CardioSmart.org/Vaccines](https://www.cardiosmart.org/Vaccines).



6. Plan for and send simple reminders to let patients know it's time to get a vaccine if they haven't already.

Life gets busy. A simple reminder message when vaccines are available can help nudge people to make a plan to get vaccinated. Reminders can be scheduled and delivered through:

- Patient portal messages
- On-hold messaging
- Simple text messages
- Email alerts/newsletters
- Mailed reminder letters



Simple reminders can go a long way

"It's time to get your flu shot. It's the best way to stay healthy and protect your heart too."

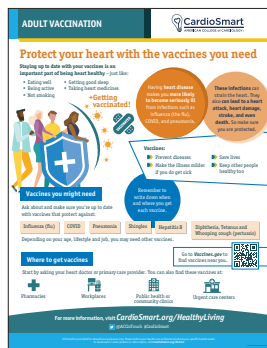
When flu vaccine is in stock and available, a second reminder can be very effective:

"Flu shots are in and available for you. Don't delay and get yours today!"
Provide information on where patients can find their vaccine.



7. Provide visual prompts for vaccination.

For example, post information about the benefits of timely vaccination in breakrooms or in the waiting area or in exam rooms. ACC's CardioSmart has a number of posters available to help educate the health care team and patients about the importance of vaccination. Visit [CardioSmart.org/Posters](https://www.cardiosmart.org/Posters).



Protect Your Heart With
the Vaccines You Need



Flu Shots
and Your Heart



COVID: 5 Ways to Keep
Your Heart Safe



8. Encourage office staff in your practice to serve as vaccine champions.

They can:

- Incorporate vaccine education and assessments into visits.
- Look for opportunities to raise awareness about vaccines (posting information in exam and waiting rooms, planning direct patient outreach).
- Issue vaccine reminders through your practice portal, on-hold messages, letters, and text messages, if opted in.
- Celebrate vaccine victories when a certain percentage of patients have received their vaccines.
- Consider reaching out to patients who do not have a fall visit scheduled to ask them to come in for or refer them for flu vaccination.



Post ACC's [***Increasing Vaccination Rates For Patients With CVD: 9 Quick Tips For Your Practice***](#) in a high-visibility area to serve as a reminder.



9. Educate patients about the safety and benefits of vaccines that are recommended.

Vaccines aren't just for kids. As we get older, other infections become a concern, for example, pneumococcal and shingles.



10. Seek to debunk myths and correct misinformation.

Validate feelings, but take time to set the record straight about vaccines in a non-judgmental way. Find [***5 Common Flu Myths Busted***](#) at [***CardioSmart.org/Flu***](https://www.cardiosmart.org/Flu).



11. Enlist and engage trusted community leaders.

When possible, find ways to partner with trusted local community leaders to help relay and disseminate positive vaccine messages and information, especially when trying to reach certain racial and ethnic populations. For example, pastors/clergy members, local salons or barber shops, local community centers, or neighborhood social clubs. This can be an effective way to disseminate information and provide health education.



12. Leverage key points in time to remind patients about the benefits of vaccination.

For example through coordinated initiatives like National Influenza Immunization Week every December to let patients know it's not too late to roll up their sleeve and protect themselves and others.

Communication Approaches to Help Make a Strong Vaccine Recommendation



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) outline suggested approaches to help health care professionals have conversations with patients about vaccinations.

SHARE (developed by the CDC for influenza vaccination)

Share the reasons why a vaccine is right for the patient

Highlight positive experiences with the vaccine (personal or in your practice), as appropriate, to reinforce the benefits and strengthen confidence in vaccination

Address patient questions and any concerns about vaccines, including side effects, safety and effectiveness in plain and understandable language

Remind patients that vaccines help protect them and their loved ones from serious illness and complications that can result in prolonged illness, hospitalization and even death in some people

Explain the potential costs of getting sick (for example, missing work or family obligations, financial costs, spreading it to older family members and others at increased risk of serious illness or friends)

How to Have Conversations About Vaccination (WHO suggested framework)

Listen with empathy and let patients know it is OK to have questions or want more information.

Ask open-ended questions, especially if someone expresses doubts. For example, "What have you heard about the [COVID, flu, RSV, etc.] vaccines?" or "Can you tell me more about why you feel that way?" or "What are you worried about?" to better understand their concerns.

Share trusted information. When you don't know the answer or if you're unsure about how to address their concern, offer to help look for information. Facts about risk reduction can be useful.

Explore reasons for wanting to get vaccinated.

Share your own reasons or motivations for wanting to get vaccinated and what helped you overcome concerns. Explain the benefits of vaccination, whether it's being able to visit family and friends again, returning to work, getting children back to school, spending time with classmates or other interactions and activities that have been strained because of [COVID-19, illness].

Tools You Can Use

Increasing Vaccination Rates for Patients With CVD

Vaccination Referral Form for Adults With Heart Disease (if your practice doesn't offer vaccines)

ACC's CardioSmart Patient Education and Tools

Handouts



Have heart disease? Get the vaccines you need to stay healthy.

Two-page summary sheet of the vaccines recommended for people with heart disease, why they are important and where to find them.



Keeping a vaccine record is important - even for adults

This handout explains why you should stay on top of your vaccines and provides a chart to write down



Stay on top of your vaccines

Use this worksheet to keep track of the vaccinations you need.



Have heart disease? Take steps to avoid the flu.

This 3-page handout provides easy-to-understand information about the flu and how the flu shot can help prevent illness and reduce the risk of subsequent cardiovascular complications, central image with 7 ways to help avoid the flu and stay healthy, and where to find vaccines.



My Plan for Heart Healthier Living

A journal-style plan for prioritizing lifestyle changes [we should add getting recommended vaccines to this]

1-minute teachable video



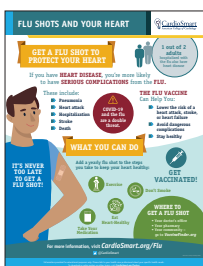
How Flu Affects Your Heart: Why Getting a Flu Shot is Important

Many people don't know that the flu can make a heart attack or stroke more likely. How? This short video helps explain and outlines steps to help avoid the flu and the heart-related troubles that can come with it.

Infographics/Posters



Protect Your Heart With the Vaccines You Need



Flu Shots and Your Heart



COVID, Flu and Your Heart: 5 Ways to Keep Your Heart Safe

Related webpages



Flu and Your Heart patient hub

[CardioSmart.org/Flu](https://www.cardiosmart.org/Flu)



5 Common Flu Myths Busted

<https://www.cardiosmart.org/topics/flu-shots-and-your-heart/5-common-flu-myths-busted>

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