Seasonal flu activity in the United States remains low, but is increasing. 3.2% of respiratory specimens tested in clinical laboratories were positive for influenza viruses. Nationally, influenza A (H3N2) and influenza B/Victoria viruses have been the most common, but H1N1 also circulated. Predominant viruses vary by region. 2.1% of visits to a health care provider were for influenza-like illness, which is below the national baseline of 2.4%. No mortality data for pneumonia and influenza are available this week due to technical issues. No new pediatric flu deaths were reported for the 2019-2020 season during week 44. The total for the season is 2.
FDA approves flu vaccine for older adults  
**Nov. 4, 2019; MD Magazine**

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is approving a new supplemental Biologics License Application for Fluzone High-Dose Quadrivalent, the first and only influenza vaccine for adults at least 65 years old.

Fluzone High-Dose, developed by Sanofi Pasteur, was first approved by the FDA in 2009 as a trivalent influenza vaccine that included a pair of influenza A strains and an influenza B strain. The new version contains an additional influenza B strain.

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How to motivate busy physicians to give more flu shots  
**Nov. 5, 2019; Harvard Business Review**

Figuring out how to get more people to get an annual flu shot is a pernicious problem in the United States: Since 2010, the proportion of American adults who get a flu shot has not risen above 46%, and it hit a low for that period of 37% in 2017. The direct medical costs of the flu are in the tens of billions of dollars each year, and the societal cost runs much higher due to millions of hours of missed work and billions of dollars in lost earnings.

Most interventions targeting patients’ thoughts and feelings have met with little success. But patients aren’t the only way to increase vaccination rates; providers wield significant influence over patient behavior: One study showed that 99% of patients accept the flu shot following a provider recommendation. But how do you motivate busy providers to vaccinate more of their patients? To address that question, we conducted a randomized controlled experiment to explore whether offering financial incentives or creating competition by informing clinics how their performance ranked
relative to others had the biggest impact. To our surprise, we found that the latter was more effective.

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**A new anti-flu weapon for people at high risk of complications**  
*Nov. 7, 2019; NextAvenue*

Everybody’s best defense against influenza is vaccination. But if you do contract the flu virus this season, it’s good to know there’s more than one effective weapon to use against it, especially if you’re at high risk for developing serious complications.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved the antiviral medication Xofluza (generic drug name baloxavir) for people who are at high risk of developing flu complications. This includes people 65 and older and those who have chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cancer.

The FDA first approved Xofluza last year for the treatment of uncomplicated flu in people 12 years and older who have had flu symptoms for less than 48 hours. However, the study that led to that initial approval didn’t include a high-risk population.

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**Strong flu shot recommendation is critical**  
*Nov. 8, 2019; AAP News*

The 2018-’19 influenza season was the longest in the last 10 years. Notably, two waves of influenza A were observed: influenza A(H1N1) pdm09 viruses from October 2018 to mid-February 2019 and influenza A(H3N2) viruses extending from February through May 2019.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that influenza virus infection caused 37.4 million to 42.9 million symptomatic illnesses; 17.3 million to 20.1 million medical visits; 531,000 to 647,000 hospitalizations; and 36,400 to 61,200 deaths in the United States.

The cumulative hospitalization rate per 100,000 population was 72 among children 0-4 years of age, 20.4 among those ages 5-17 years, 25.8 among adults ages 18-49, 80.7 among adults ages 50-64 and 221.7 among adults 65 and older, according to the Influenza Hospitalization Surveillance Network.

Among the hospitalized children, 55% had at least one underlying medical condition, with asthma (27.1%) and neurologic disorders (14.7%) being the most commonly reported.

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**Wisconsin reports six flu deaths, dozens of hospitalizations**
So far, six people have died and almost 40 people have been hospitalized. “We have had 38 hospitalizations since the first of September, which is quite a bit more than we would normally see at this time,” Tom Haupt with the state health department said. The people who died from the flu were over the age of 65. Health officials said those are some of the people that are most at risk. Pregnant women and babies less than six months old are also at a high risk.

**Is there a shortage of the high-dose flu shot?**

A variety of news outlets have reported that some people are having trouble finding Fluzone High-Dose, the version of the flu vaccine that is specially formulated to produce a more robust immune response in people 65 and older.

And when Consumer Reports called 20 pharmacies across the country, we found that about half had already run out of Fluzone High-Dose, while half had the vaccine in stock.

But a representative for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told CR that it hasn’t had any reports of shortfalls of Fluzone High-Dose. And Nicolas Kressman, a spokesperson for Sanofi Pasteur, the company that manufactures Fluzone High-Dose, says there’s no overall shortage of the vaccine.

**US flu continues slow rise with plenty of flu B activity**

Flu activity increased again last week, and though illnesses are at relatively low levels, all three strains are circulating, including plenty of influenza B, especially in the southern states, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said today in its weekly update.

Typically, most influenza B activity occurs toward the end of the flu season, but last season saw very little influenza B activity and was marked by two waves of influenza A, the first from 2009 H1N1 and the second from H3N2.
#FluShotSelfie Social Media Campaign
Join us in our #FluShotSelfie campaign on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to show others how we protect ourselves and others with an annual flu vaccine! Simply use the hashtag and feel free to tag us!

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Flu Champion Program
FFF recently launched its Flu Champion program, which aims to mobilize and support people at the community level in flu awareness and education efforts. As part of this program, FFF has developed four different advocacy toolkits for schools, healthcare professionals, employers and community organizations, and general advocates. Interested in becoming a Flu Champion yourself? Reach out to us at contact@familiesfightingflu.org.

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