

OC Health Care Agency Updates: Flu Vaccinations Available, COVID Vaccine Booster, Costly COVID-19 Hospitalizations of Unvaccinated, Delta-8 THC Health Advisory

(Santa Ana, CA) - As the fall season begins, the OC Health Care Agency (HCA) encourages all residents over the age of six months to get vaccinated against influenza, also known as the seasonal flu. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), **influenza vaccines can be safely co-administered with COVID-19 vaccines for both eligible children and adults.**

“Last year, we saw very low numbers of flu cases, most likely due to the mitigation measures that were in place to avoid the spread of COVID-19 including mask wearing, social distancing, and remote working and learning,” says **Dr. Clayton Chau**, County Health Officer and HCA Director. “Now that people are returning to normal activities, and due to reduced population immunity from low virus activity since the COVID-19 pandemic started, we may see an early and higher prevalence of influenza this year. Many people have already experienced a great deal of stress with COVID-19 alone, so we do not want them to worry about the flu, too. If you are not yet vaccinated for either COVID-19 or the flu, please know that you can receive both the COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time.”

Dr. Chau says late September is a good time to get vaccinated against influenza as the flu season typically lasts from October through May. The virus constantly changes, which means people can get infected with the flu every year. Like COVID-19, the best way to prevent the flu is through vaccination. Eligible residents are encouraged to get their flu shot when it becomes available, by asking their doctor, visiting their healthcare provider, or going to a local pharmacy or clinic. For more information on flu shots in Orange County, visit ochealthinfo.com/flu.

COVID Vaccine Booster Shots

On September 22, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [approved](#) the administration of booster shots of the Comirnaty (Pfizer) vaccine for certain populations. The OC Health Care Agency will begin offering booster shots once we receive recommendations and approvals from the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the Western States Scientific Safety Review Workgroup and the California Department of Public Health. The HCA continues to focus on delivering vaccines to our most vulnerable population and hard-to-reach communities.

Status of COVID-19 Cases in Orange County

Between September 16 and September 23, the seven-day average COVID-19 case rate dropped from 12.3 to 11 per 100,000 people, with the average number of daily COVID-19 cases declining from 396 to 356. The positivity rate also decreased from 4.3 to 3.6 percent, hospitalizations from 367 to 313 per day, and ICU admissions from 108 to 87 per day. Orange County COVID-19 case counts and testing figures are updated daily, Monday through Friday, at occovid19.ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc.

According to a [recent study](#) from the Peterson Center on Healthcare and KFF partnership, 287,000 unvaccinated people were hospitalized due to COVID-19 between June to August 2021, resulting in a cost of over \$5 billion.

“Hospitalizations of people who are unvaccinated against COVID-19 are very costly, but they are preventable,” says **Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong**, Deputy County Health Officer. “During this recent surge, over 91% of those hospitalized from COVID-19 illness were unvaccinated individuals. Data from the CDC indicates that the incidence of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death is higher in unvaccinated persons. These are additional reasons why we continue to encourage our unvaccinated residents to get vaccinated. As we enter the flu season, we need to be extra careful about protecting ourselves, our loved ones and neighbors against getting sick or hospitalized. The most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the flu is by getting vaccinated.”

Residents who have not yet received their initial COVID-19 vaccine series can visit any local pharmacy or healthcare provider, or go online to [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), [MyTurn.ca.gov](https://www.myturn.ca.gov) or [Othena.com](https://www.othena.com), to schedule a vaccination appointment. For more details, visit <https://occovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-vaccine-distribution-channels>.

CDC Advisory on Delta-8 THC

On September 14, the CDC released a [health advisory](#) regarding the potential for adverse events related to the use of delta-8 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) products, due to reports of adverse events occurring in both adults and children under the age of 18.

Delta-8 THC is a psychoactive substance found in the *Cannabis sativa* plant, of which marijuana and hemp are two varieties. Delta-8 THC products are sometimes marketed as “weed light” or “diet weed.” The health effects of delta-8 THC have not yet been researched extensively and are not well-understood. A wide variety of delta-8 THC-containing products have entered the marketplace, including, but not limited to, vapes, smokable hemp sprayed with delta-8 THC extract, distillates, tinctures, gummies, chocolates, and infused beverages.

From December 2020 through July 2021, the FDA received reports from both consumers and law enforcement of adverse events that resulted from the use of products containing delta-8 THC, including vomiting, hallucinations, trouble standing, difficulty breathing and coma. National poison control centers received 660 exposure cases from January 1, 2021, through July 31, 2021. Of the exposure cases, 39% involved pediatric patients less than 18 years of age and 18% required hospitalizations, including children who required ICU admission.

Recommendations for the public:

- Consumers should be aware of possible limitations in the labeling of products containing THC and Cannabidiol (CBD) even from approved marijuana and hemp retailers.
- Consumers should be aware that products labeled as hemp or CBD may contain delta-8 THC.
- Parents who consume edibles and other products that contain THC and CBD should store them safely away from children.
- If consumers experience adverse effects of THC- or CBD-containing products that are an immediate danger to their health, they should call the regional poison control center at (800) 222-1222, 9-1-1, or seek medical attention at their local emergency room and report the ingredients of ingested products to healthcare providers.