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Washington flu deaths increased tenfold this season compared to last year *Vaccine was effective in preventing flu hospitalizations*

OLYMPIA – Following two seasons of unusually low flu activity, the 2022-2023 flu season was the deadliest in five years. A total of 262 Washingtonians were reported to have died from the flu, including 257 adults and five children, which is a tenfold increase compared to the [2021-2022 flu season](#). Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates as many as 640,000 flu hospitalizations and 57,000 flu deaths occurred between Oct. 1 – April 29, 2023.

This year’s flu vaccine reduced risk of influenza A-related hospitalization among children by nearly three quarters and among adults by nearly half, [according to the CDC](#). Despite vaccine effectiveness, flu vaccination rates have decreased nationally in certain groups. Flu vaccination rates for children dropped more than 6% and rates for pregnant people decreased nearly 15% compared with pre-pandemic rates.

“While respiratory illness precautions such as masking and social distancing helped keep the number of flu cases low during the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s especially important now that most of us are around other people again to get a flu vaccine every year,” said Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health. “The flu vaccine is your best protection against this serious disease. Even if you get the flu, if you’ve been vaccinated typically your illness is milder and you aren’t as likely to need to go to the hospital.”

Practicing healthy habits such as frequently washing hands, staying home when sick, and wearing masks in crowded spaces also help prevent the spread of the flu. These precautions protect people in our community who are most likely to be affected by severe flu disease, including:

- People over age 65.
- People who are immunocompromised.

- Children under age five.
- Pregnant people.
- People with chronic health conditions.

In Washington state, flu activity rose at the end of October and peaked by the end of November. As of the end of April, there was only minimal flu activity. Further information can be found on the Washington State Department of Health's [Flu Overview page](#).

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