

Getting a Head Start on Flu Season: Planning and Pre-booking Vaccines

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [begins tracking each year's influenza, "flu," season in October](#), preparation begins long before autumn arrives.

In February of each year, the World Health Organization (WHO) gathers an [advisory group to analyze influenza surveillance data and issue recommendations](#) for the Northern Hemisphere's upcoming seasonal flu vaccine. Healthcare organizations and vaccine manufacturers use these recommendations to plan and design seasonal flu vaccines, which [protect against the most threatening influenza virus strains](#) as predicted by researchers, reports the CDC. This important set of decisions is an early signal to the start of the annual influenza vaccination cycle.

Planning Flu Vaccine Orders

One of the next decisions in the preparation for the season is often made by providers and clinicians. Placing advance orders for vaccines for the upcoming flu season, or "pre-booking," often occurs between [January and March, according to the CDC](#). By pre-booking, providers can ensure that they have the appropriate number and selection of vaccines for patients. For planning vaccine variety, the CDC outlines [special considerations](#) including the number of children, the number of patients who are recommended to receive a high-dose vaccine, and the number of patients that have or may have egg allergies. Any expected increases in patient roster should also be considered. Additionally, the inventory planning that providers do ahead of flu season includes having [proper space to store vaccines](#) to ensure vaccines remain effective.

Planning Flu Vaccine Administration

Providers may also take the time early in the preparation process to create or update standing orders. Standing orders, as outlined by the Immunization Action Coalition, are "[written protocols approved by a physician that allow another qualified health care professional to assess a patient's need for and administer vaccines](#)." The coalition reports that standing orders can [streamline workflow](#) and are an effective way to [increase vaccination rates](#) by creating more opportunities for vaccination in interactions with other clinicians besides the patient's primary physician.

Integrating standing orders into a practice's workflow can take time. Starting early gives staff ample time to learn the process and become familiar with it before flu season arrives. According to the CDC, [patients should be vaccinated by the end of October](#) for maximum effectiveness, as it takes about [two weeks from vaccination](#) for the antibodies that protect against influenza to develop.

Planning Flu Vaccine Communication

As flu season approaches, providers also face the challenge of overcoming potential vaccine hesitancy; AAP research has associated parents' hesitancy on behalf of their children with [declining influenza vaccination rates](#). Providers can begin notifying patients that they have flu vaccines as early as the summer to help prompt them to make a decision and schedule vaccinations. Research has shown that early notices [increase the likelihood that patients visit their provider](#) for their vaccinations, helping to ensure patients receive the appropriate influenza vaccine for their age and medical history.

Particular communication strategies include [emailing patients](#) ahead of existing appointments to offer flu vaccines, which can help improve uptake according to research published in *Vaccine*. Additionally, a [Rutgers study](#) found that patients who had appointments made for them were more likely to get vaccinated than those who received no instruction. The CDC also recommends a [combination of reminder interventions](#), such as reminders in waiting areas or suggestions for booking appointments at check-in and check-out.

As valuable sources of vaccination information for patients, providers have the opportunity to help patients plan ahead for flu season as they plan ahead for their organizations. Though the annual flu season does not begin until October, it is never too early for clinicians to get ahead of the season and help keep patients healthy.

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