

Facing Covid-19, lets get the flu shot!

Press release from the French National Academy of Medicine

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The Covid-19 pandemic partially has overshadowed the 2019-20 seasonal influenza epidemic, which was more moderate than the previous winter flu. The rate of consultations for influenza-like illness decreased from 600 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018-19 to 300 per 100,000 the following year, and the excess mortality due to influenza appears to have been much lower, although the final results are not yet consolidated.

The current evolution of SARS-CoV-2 in France and in the European countries does not allow to date any forecast on the duration of the Covid-19 epidemic and suggests that the virus will continue to circulate during the autumn and winter 2020-21.

However, the proven severity of Covid-19 should not lead us to underestimate the potential severity of the coming influenza epidemic. The lack of a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 should not obscure the fact that there is an influenza vaccine available, ineffective against Covid-19 of course, but essential to protect the population from a severe seasonal influenza epidemic. Like every year, the composition of the vaccine for the 2020-21 season has been decided by who, so that the doses can be produced on time by the pharmaceutical industry.

Uncertainties about the occurrence of a second wave of the Covid-19 epidemic, and the magnitude of the next seasonal influenza outbreak, should make us consider the catastrophic scenario in which the combination of the two epidemics would lead to an overload of the intensive care units and a new peak in excess mortality, particularly in nursing homes.

This eventuality makes it necessary not only to complete influenza vaccination coverage, which remains insufficient in the population defined in the 2020 vaccination schedule, but also to extend this protection to any person with risk factors for severe progression in the event of an influenza virus or a SARS Covid-19 infection.

It is therefore urgent to implement a reinforcement of the vaccination schedule at the next launch of the seasonal influenza vaccination campaign, and as of now for the overseas departments and territories of the southern hemisphere.

More specifically, the National Academy of Medicine recommends:

1. to initiate a large-scale information campaign "Influenza and Covid-19" to raise public awareness of the risks of a co-epidemic;
2. to combine influenza vaccination and pneumococcal vaccination in people over 65 years of age, because of the seriousness of invasive pneumococcal infections on this ground;
3. to make influenza vaccination compulsory for all health and social workers in contact with vulnerable persons, especially in nursing homes, institutions, hospitals and nurseries;
4. to remind doctors of being subject to the obligation to offer influenza vaccination to all consultants.