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COVID-19 and the coming flu season

As COVID-19 vaccinations become more widespread throughout the U.S., many people are hoping to pack up their masks, put the pandemic behind them, and move on. But viruses rarely disappear completely, and the likelihood of COVID-19 simply going away is slim.

With that in mind, Matthew Binnicker, Ph.D., director of the Clinical Virology Laboratory in Mayo Clinic's Division of Clinical Microbiology, considers the prospects for COVID-19 this fall as the traditional influenza season ramps up. He also discusses advances in testing that have been developed over the last 16 months because of the pandemic, and re-emphasizes the crucial role of vaccines.

Q. How was last year's influenza season unique?

A. Last year, we didn't see much of an influenza season at all. We were bracing for both influenza and COVID-19 at the same time. But there turned out to be very few influenza cases across the country.

I think the reason for that was the strong adherence to COVID-19 mitigation measures like masking. A lot of people were continuing to work remotely at that time. Students were not in school, and there wasn't much travel. All of those factors combined to keep flu case counts low.

Q. What should we know about this coming fall and winter?

A. Coronaviruses typically have a seasonal predominance where we see more cases in the winter. Couple that with the fact that the country has started to reopen — there's less adherence with masking and people are getting together again — and we're contending with variants, and we'll likely see a resurgence in COVID-19 this fall. It's also probable that we'll experience a more typical influenza season.

We've already started to see an increase in respiratory viruses now, including RSV, which is unusual during the summer months. That emphasizes the fact that these viruses don't just go away. They're out there, and when there's an opening, they are going to take advantage and cause disease.



Although I don't think we're going to see the level of hospitalizations and deaths that we saw last December and January from COVID-19, it's still a concern. Even if we see 20% of what we saw last year, along with a more typical influenza season, it could make for tough times in hospitals and clinics across the country.

Q. Are we better equipped to test for COVID-19 along with influenza than we were before?

A. We do have several options now for combined COVID-19/influenza testing, as well as for RSV. So, yes, we have the capacity to do that type of testing. The concern is always that if we see a dramatic increase in influenza cases, along with an increase in COVID-19, will the test manufacturers be able to produce enough test reagents so all the labs can get what they need for testing? That was a problem last year, and we could be facing it again this year.

There are also at-home COVID-19 testing options now that we didn't have before. So rather than going to a doctor, and having a doctor order the lab test, people have the option to go to a drugstore, purchase the test and take it at home. It's

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a reasonable approach. My concern is that a lot of those methods haven't been vigorously studied yet to determine how they compare with lab-based tests. For example, could a negative test be a result of a test taken too soon? How do we ensure a patient gets the care they need if they do get a positive test? These are challenges we still need to tackle.

One of the benefits, though, is that the technology for at-home testing and at-home sample collection has accelerated rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That could have widespread application for other infectious diseases going forward — increasing convenience for patients and potentially decreasing risk of spreading disease.

Q. Vaccines are on everyone's mind right now. What role will they play this fall and winter?

A. How well the country heeds the recommendations for both COVID-19 and flu vaccination will determine the severity of

what we experience this fall and winter. A lot of people did a good job of getting the flu vaccine last year because they heard the messages about flu vaccinations being crucial amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We need the same thing to happen this year. When the flu vaccine becomes available, I'm urging everyone to get it.

We also need to build up our defenses as high as possible against COVID-19 now. In many parts of the country, the rates of COVID-19 are lower today than they were four or five months ago. Some states are having significant surges, but overall, the rates are lower than they were last winter. And they likely are lower now than they will be this fall and winter. So, if you haven't received your COVID-19 vaccine yet, now is definitely the time.

Source: <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/covid-19-qa-looking-to-the-2021-flu-season-and-beyond/>

10 Early Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's

Memory loss that disrupts daily life may be a symptom of Alzheimer's or other dementia. Alzheimer's is a brain disease that causes a slow decline in memory, thinking and reasoning skills. There are 10 warning signs and symptoms. If you notice any of them, don't ignore them. Schedule an appointment with your doctor.

Memory loss that disrupts daily life

One of the most common signs of Alzheimer's disease, especially in the early stage, is forgetting recently learned information. Others include forgetting important dates or events, asking for the same questions over and over, and increasingly needing to rely on memory aids (e.g., reminder notes or electronic devices) or family members for things they used to handle on their own.

What's a typical age-related change?

Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

Challenges in planning or solving problems

Some people living with dementia may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.

What's a typical age-related change?

Making occasional errors when managing finances or household bills.



Difficulty completing familiar tasks

People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes they may have trouble driving to a familiar location, organizing a grocery list, or remembering the rules of a favorite game.

What's a typical age-related change?

Occasionally needing help to use microwave settings or to record a TV show.

Confusion with time or place

People living with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding

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something if it is not happening immediately. Sometimes they may forget where they are or how they got there.

What's a typical age-related change?

Getting confused about the day of the week but figuring it out later.

Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships

For some people, having vision problems is a sign of Alzheimer's. This may lead to difficulty with balance or trouble reading. They may also have problems judging distance and determining color or contrast, causing issues with driving.

What's a typical age-related change?

Vision changes related to cataracts.

New problems with words in speaking or writing

People living with Alzheimer's may have trouble following or joining a conversation. They may stop in the middle of a conversation and have no idea how to continue or they may repeat themselves. They may struggle with vocabulary, have trouble naming a familiar object or use the wrong name (e.g., calling a "watch" a "hand-clock").

What's a typical age-related change?

Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.

Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps

A person living with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to go back over their steps to find them again. He or she may accuse others of stealing, especially as the disease progresses.

What's a typical age-related change?

Misplacing things from time to time and retracing steps to find them.

Decreased or poor judgment

Individuals may experience changes in judgment or decision-making. For example, they may use poor judgment when

dealing with money or pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean.

What's a typical age-related change?

Making a bad decision or mistake once in a while, like neglecting to change the oil in the car.

Withdrawal from work or social activities

A person living with Alzheimer's disease may experience changes in the ability to hold or follow a conversation. As a result, he or she may withdraw from hobbies, social activities, or other engagements. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite team or activity.

What's a typical age-related change?

Sometimes feeling uninterested in family or social obligations.

Changes in mood and personality

Individuals living with Alzheimer's may experience mood and personality changes. They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful, or anxious. They may be easily upset at home, with friends or when out of their comfort zone.

What's a typical age-related change?

Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.

If you notice one or more signs in yourself or another person, it can be difficult to know what to do. It's natural to feel uncertain or nervous about discussing these changes with others. Voicing worries about your own health might make them seem more "real." Or you may fear upsetting someone by sharing observations about changes in his or her abilities or behavior. However, these are significant health concerns that should be evaluated by a doctor, and it's important to take action to figure out what's going on.

Source: <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/10>

How To Celebrate Family Health & Fitness Day USA

Family Health and Fitness Day USA is on the last Saturday of September and it's a day that promotes physical activity and health with your loved ones. We share genes with our family, but aren't aware of the everyday habits we develop from our families as well. Thankfully, Family Health and Fitness Day USA reminds us to put family fitness first.

1. Play a family sport

Decide amongst your family what sport everyone wants to play and go out and play! It can be anything from football, baseball, basketball, or soccer and for added fun, invite another family to a friendly match. If those sports are too serious, you can always play a less strict game of tag. As long as you're moving that's all that matters.

2. Attend a local event at a health club

Contact your local YMCAs and health clubs to see if they are hosting any events in honor of Family Health and Fitness Day USA. You can bring your family along and

learn more about general physical fitness and how you can improve your health. Afterward, you can discuss with everyone what you've learned.

3. Go for a bike ride

Pull your bikes out of the garage, dust off the seats, and go for a bike ride. Find the nearest bike path or go riding around your neighborhood for a fun way to exercise. It's low impact, it doesn't demand a high level of skill, and it's an effective cardio workout. Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

Source: <https://nationaltoday.com/family-health-fitness-day-usa/#how-to>

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