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## **Staying Up to Date with Vaccinations this Fall**

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As we enter the fall season, it is important that we stay up to date with all of our vaccinations. Our keiki are back in school, activities and gatherings have resumed, and the overall aloha spirit has been rejuvenated since the pandemic. We can remain best protected from many diseases when we stay up to date with all of our vaccinations. With the release of an updated COVID-19 booster aligned with the release of annual flu shots, you may be wondering if or when you should get these vaccinations.

An updated COVID-19 booster is now available in our community. This updated booster includes a mixture of the original virus strains and Omicron strains. It is recommended by the CDC that everyone who is eligible for this updated booster receive it as COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States are safe and effective at protecting people from getting seriously ill, being hospitalized, and even dying. You are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines if you have completed a COVID-19 vaccine primary series and received the most recent booster dose recommended for you.

Flu vaccinations are also available in our community. There are numerous benefits of receiving your flu vaccine once a year. It can keep you from getting sick with the flu, reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalization, and may also protect people around you. The CDC also recommends that everyone who is eligible for their flu shot receive it once a year. If you have not already received your flu shot, now is a great time to get your vaccination as September and October are ideal months to receive it. You may even receive your flu shot and updated COVID-19 booster at the same time!

You may ask, well, where can I get my flu shot and updated COVID-19 booster? Check with your local pharmacies, health care providers and clinics. When the first COVID-19 vaccines were available at the end of 2020, we saw our healthcare community rise to the challenge by opening vaccination clinic sites island-wide. Look for these opportunities near you as we try to provide access to all members of our community. One thing to consider is that nowadays you may need to make an appointment to receive your vaccination. This allows for efficient and timely service, all the while keeping you safe. Help your family and friends make appointments if necessary and help connect them to vaccination providers.

As a community pharmacist, I see the importance of vaccinations for not only myself but my entire family. From the youngest to our oldest family members, I have seen them roll up their sleeves to get their vaccinations so they can stay up to date. We need to continue to keep our community safe and this is one of the ways we can do our part. For more information on staying up to date with your vaccinations, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or speak with your primary care provider or pharmacist.

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Community First is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit founded by the late Barry Taniguchi in 2014 to serve as a neutral forum for the community to come together, and as a catalyst for solutions to improve health and access to health care. Through its programs, Community First hopes to shift the model of healthcare from reactively treating disease, to proactively caring for the health of every person on Hawai'i Island. For more information, please visit our website at [www.communityfirsthawaii.org](http://www.communityfirsthawaii.org) or Facebook and Instagram pages at [@communityfirsthawaii](https://www.facebook.com/communityfirsthawaii).