



# How Will COVID-19 Affect Flu Season?

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As flu season begins to get underway, hospitals, clinics and medical centres across the UAE have experienced an unprecedented surge in demand for flu vaccines. Normally beginning in October, concerned residents have been enquiring about the jab earlier and in greater numbers than ever before.

It's believed that this is in part due to a concerted awareness raising campaign conducted through the Emirates in recent years. However, the biggest factor is undoubtedly COVID-19, which has had people of all ages more concerned about how their immune systems will cope with infection this coming winter.

## Running out of supplies

Increased demand has been reported throughout the country, with many medical centres indicating that the backlog has meant that their existing supplies have been exhausted. One of them, the Zulekha Hospital Dubai, has reported that most of those already given the vaccine were 12 years or older in age, while stocks have now run out on the existing three-strain vaccine.

"We are yet to receive the new four-strain vaccine," [explained Dr Shipra Sen](#), an internal medical specialist at Zulekha. "In the meantime, we were giving only the trivalent vaccine jabs - which we have now exhausted. We have been reassured that the more effective quadrivalent influenza vaccine will be available in a week's time."

The new four-strain supply is expected to be more effective in overcoming mutations in seasonal influenza than its trivalent predecessor. Given that the body must be given time to react to the vaccine, Dr Sen believes that the fact that people are asking for it earlier in the year than previously is a good thing.

## Panic fuelling demand

National Seasonal Flu Awareness Campaign was launched last month by the Ministry of Health and Prevention (Mohap), as it is every year. This has certainly helped to raise awareness among the general populace over the importance of inoculating against the common ailment, but [fears over a "second wave" of coronavirus](#) are believed to be the biggest contributing factor to the rise in demand.

The UAE has fared well in terms of managing the spread of coronavirus so far, with a little under 100,000 confirmed cases and only 426 deaths at the time of writing. However, there are fears that a second wave could see another surge in infections. If



a person becomes infected with the common flu while their body is already battling coronavirus (or vice versa), it could have dire consequences for their recovery.

While the majority of vaccinations have been requested by those aged 12 or over, anecdotal evidence suggests that concerned parents are also requesting to have their children vaccinated in higher numbers than ever seen before. One hospital reported a 20% surge in demand, while several have run out of supplies of the trivalent vaccine and are now waiting for the four-strain alternative to be delivered, which is expected to happen at the beginning of October.