



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CONTACT:**

Elizabeth Reiss  
South Dakota State Medical Association  
[ereiss@sdsma.org](mailto:ereiss@sdsma.org); 605-336-1965

Andrea Polkinghorn, BSN, RN-BC  
Immunize South Dakota  
[izcoalition.sf@gmail.com](mailto:izcoalition.sf@gmail.com); 605-261-2402

Aaron Hunt, PhD, MPH  
South Dakota Public Health Association  
[Aaron.hunt@sdstate.edu](mailto:Aaron.hunt@sdstate.edu); 702-715-8522

**South Dakota State Medical Association, Immunize South Dakota, and South Dakota Public Health Association urge South Dakotans to get flu vaccine to prevent dual surge of flu, coronavirus**

SIOUX FALLS – Sept. 23, 2020 – As flu season begins, the South Dakota State Medical Association, Immunize South Dakota, and the South Dakota Public Health Association are urging South Dakotans to get vaccinated by the end of October.

“It is more important than ever to get vaccinated against the flu,” said Benjamin Aaker, MD, SDSMA president. “We encourage everyone over 6 months of age to get their flu shot in September or October. We know vaccination is the most effective way to protect both adults and children against the flu and its potentially serious complications or even death.”

South Dakota is home to a large population of people at risk for serious flu complications including older individuals (65+), pregnant women, children younger than 5 years old, and people with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes and asthma. Last month, the CDC published a [study](#) of more than 80,000 U.S. adults hospitalized with the flu which found that serious, sudden heart complications occurred in one in eight patients. “Please make a plan to get a flu shot today because it is the best way to protect yourself, your loved ones, individuals at high-risk for complications, and everyone in the community,” said Aaron Hunt, PhD, MPH, president of the South Dakota Public Health Association.

A person sick with the flu can easily develop a secondary infection such as bacterial pneumonia or COVID-19, increasing the likelihood that a patient could be hospitalized. Evidence shows that vaccination reduces flu severity and prevents hospitalizations – which is critical during this time when health care systems are burdened by COVID-19. “The importance of being vaccinated against the flu this year is twofold,” said Santiago Lopez, MD, of Immunize South Dakota. “We want to ensure that patients are protected, and we must keep the health care system from becoming overwhelmed if we experience a surge in COVID-19 cases at the same time as a flu outbreak.”

“Measures are in place to make sure people are safe wherever they choose to get vaccinated. Appointments can be made at doctors’ offices, all of which are following CDC guidance to minimize risk of contracting COVID-19.” Dr. Aaker said. Some areas are holding clinics in parking lots and drive-through sites. Sign up for text reminders to get your flu vaccine by texting SDFLU to 47177. This texting

program is being offered by Immunize South Dakota in collaboration with the national organization Families Fighting Flu.

All three organizations are reminding everyone that in addition to receiving the flu vaccine, be sure to continue preventative actions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection. “Wash hands, practice social distancing, wear masks and stay home if you’re not feeling well. All of these measures will prove critical in the months ahead,” Dr. Lopez said.

*The SDSMA serves physicians and medical students who are dedicated to the health of South Dakotans. The SDSMA’s mission is to promote the art and science of medicine, protect and improve the health of the public, and advocate for the well-being of patients and the best environment for physicians to advance quality care. Learn more at [www.sdsma.org](http://www.sdsma.org).*

*The South Dakota Public Health Association is the only trade association in South Dakota for public health professionals, students, and allies and has long been an outspoken voice on issues affecting the health of South Dakotans. Learn more at <https://sdpha.clubexpress.com/>.*

*Immunize South Dakota is a not for profit coalition comprised of healthcare and public health professionals, community leaders, parents, businesses, and others who are dedicated to improving vaccination rates in South Dakota. Members are committed to increasing immunization rates for all age levels and serving as an important resource for healthcare professionals and their patients through advocacy and education.*