SCI-TECH

"Sometimes, the greatest miracle is recognizing that the world can change"
BARACK OBAMA 44TH U.S. PRESIDENT

Free walk-in vaccinations return to Yale Health

BY JOSEPH HWANG
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



REGINA SUNG

More than 3,600 flu and COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered to Yale students this fall, as Yale Health continues its annual vaccination campaign ahead of the winter respiratory illness season.

As flu season approaches, Yale Health is encouraging students to take advantage of its free flu and COVID-19 vaccination clinics, offering walk-in services six days a week to help protect the campus community against respiratory illnesses.

The vaccination program allows students, including those who are not on Yale's health insurance, to receive either or both vaccines without an appointment. As of Tuesday, the clinic has administered 3,681 student vaccinations this fall, including 2,223 influenza vaccines and 1,458 COVID-19 vaccines, according to figures provided by Yale Health.

"The time is now," Gordon Streeter, the chief of student health at Yale Health, said. "You get the shot now, in October, your protection kicks in early November. By early November, we really are seeing the flu on campus."

Unlike other immunizations offered through Yale Health, which generally require appointments, flu and COVID-19 vaccinations are available on a walk-in basis. This fall marks the second consecutive year that Yale Health has operated its seasonal vaccination program without requiring advance scheduling.

Yale Health affiliates stressed the importance of receiving vaccinations before influenza transmission increases later in the semester.

"We're here to keep everyone healthy, so take advantage," Dava Vitale, the program coordinator of the vaccination clinic, said.

Yale Health's large-scale walk-in clinics will operate through Nov. 20, after which vaccinations will continue on the building's second floor until winter recess. Beginning in January, students will still be able to receive vaccinations through the immunization department, although advance scheduling will generally be necessary.

"You don't have to have an appointment," Streeter said. "You got a class canceled? Pop over."

Following vaccination, patients receive aftercare instructions and are offered an optional 15-minute observation period.

Operating the vaccination program requires considerable logistical coordination. During vaccination season, Yale Health employs more than 50 nurses on a temporary basis, including retirees and nursing students who receive hands-on clinical training.

"All the permanent nurses in this building have to do their permanent job, and they can't just get pulled," Tim Brown, the director of communications for Yale Health, said.

Beyond operational challenges, officials said, another challenge is that some students remain unaware of the services available to them.

According to Streeter, some students mistakenly believe that waiving Yale's health insurance coverage prevents them from accessing services at the health center. However, students who waive this coverage retain access to a range of services, including primary care and seasonal vaccinations.

Wint Lin '30, who received a vaccination this fall, said she learned about the free clinics through her friends rather than directly from Yale Health.

Lin said she ultimately decided to get vaccinated after accompanying her professor and peers to Yale Health following class. Although Lin described the walk to Yale Health from William L. Harkness Hall as lengthy, she said the vaccination process itself was quick.

"Once I got there, the line was about five minutes, and then the shot itself didn't take more than two minutes," Lin said.

Officials emphasized that Yale's residential college system makes vaccination particularly important. Students frequently share living spaces, dining halls and classrooms, creating opportunities for respiratory illnesses to spread throughout the community.

"Not only are students living together, but eating together, going to class together," Streeter said. "All that's a perfect trifecta of things spreading."

Beyond vaccination, Yale Health officials recommended maintaining basic preventive practices, including frequent handwashing, adequate sleep, regular exercise and balanced nutrition.

Yale Health is located at 55 Lock St.

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After patients are seen at Yale New Haven, many wait for a bed

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Most patients who walk into the Yale New Haven Hospital's emergency department don't have to wait long to be seen by a doctor. But if you're a patient who needs to be admitted, you may be waiting for a bed for hours on end.

In 2025, 47.9 percent of patients admitted through the hospital's emergency department waited for more than four hours after a decision to admit them had been made, according to a March report from the Connecticut Hospital Association. This waiting period, known as "boarding," is experienced by 37.9 percent of admitted emergency patients statewide. Yale New Haven Hospital treated 228,586 patients in 2025, the most of all the hospitals documented in the report.

Marci Mitchell, the senior director of ChimeData Analytics at the CHA, said it is important to distinguish between the time it takes to see a provider and boarding.

"It is not your wait time," Mitchell said in an interview.

Instead, the clock starts once a patient has been assessed by a doctor and marked as requiring inpatient care. If that patient is still in the emergency department after four hours have elapsed, they are then considered to be boarding.

Arjun Venkatesh, the chief of Emergency Medicine for YNHH, said only about 2 percent of the hospital's patients leave without being seen by a provider.

"Our emergency departments are amongst the national leaders in having low wait times," Venkatesh said in a video interview.

He said that the hospital's recent expansions, which include converting its parking circle into a 34-bed Emergency Department Annex and adding a 16-bed accelerated care unit, have helped reduce the time patients spend waiting.

Wait time lengths for some patients, however, can be unexpected. Surya Mohan '28 recounted a visit to Yale New Haven Hospital in December 2024, when, he said, he waited hours to be seen.

"I had a head injury and was transported in an ambulance around 10:30 PM," Mohan wrote in a text to the News. "I was discharged a bit past 3:00 AM and it took approximately 2 hours to be seen and receive care."

Mohan says he found the wait time to be "quite surprising," considering the magnitude of the injury, but said he didn't question it given that it was his first visit to the YNHH emergency department.

According to Venkatesh, the hospital's census, which records the number of patients receiving care, almost always indicates that it is near capacity.

"There are certainly days where we have higher volume days where the hospital is very full and waits go up," Venkatesh said.

He said that the hospitals with the longest wait times and boarding times are often the fullest ones. Venkatesh co-authored a research letter in 2022 that found that boarding times soar once hospitals pass the 85 percent occupancy level.

When asked how often Yale New Haven Health was above that level, he said, "every day."

"When you see boarding, I think it's always important for people to recognize it's not in and of itself the problem," Venkatesh said. "It's a symptom."

Some periods of waiting can arise because beds are occupied by patients who are ready to leave but who are unable to be discharged safely due to factors like immigration status, housing or financial insecurity, or a lack of social support. Though nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities may have open beds, staffing can be limited.

The CHA reports six major root causes of boarding, among them Medicaid underfunding, housing instability, a shortage of behavioral health services and delays appointing conservators, who make medical decisions for patients.

Mitchell added that even if there are empty beds available, providers have to consider hospital unit location, gender in shared rooms and patients with communicable diseases.

"We say in healthcare, 'A bed is not a bed,'" Mitchell said. "If a person leaves, it does not automatically mean that somebody waiting in the ED can go take that bed."

Mitchell pointed to behavioral health as the most common complication that lengthens boarding times. According to the statewide report, behavioral health patients statewide spent 30 hours on average in the emergency department in 2025. Children with behavioral health needs spent 38 hours.

Unlike most hospitals, though, YNHH has a psychiatric hospital and a crisis intervention unit, Venkatesh said.

"That's not true in most of America, and certainly not in the rest of the state," Venkatesh said. "I have colleagues who are chairs of emergency departments around Connecticut. They have patients who've been in their emergency department for five days, eight days, waiting for psychiatric care. And we're fortunate."

Both Mitchell and Venkatesh said the hospital cannot fix wait time issues on its own. They said changes to Medicaid coverage and funding only exacerbate the issue. According to Venkatesh, proposed Medicaid changes may also create more barriers for financially-strained hospitals to invest in more staff and beds.

Asked what he would change about the health system, Venkatesh said he would create financial incentives for "flexible capacity" to allow for hospitals to build more adaptable, lower-cost beds.

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ZOE BERG

According to a Connecticut Hospital Association report, nearly half of the Yale New Haven Hospital's patients admitted through the emergency department last year faced a four-hour wait for an inpatient bed.