

Audience: Parents (all)

CDC: 2011-2012 Flu Season

Word Count: 745

The flu vaccine—Protection from the flu. Peace of mind for you.

As a parent, you do everything you can to protect your children. Buckle them up in the car. Watch them closely when they're in the water. Teach them to look both ways when they cross the street. Warn them not to talk to strangers.

How about also making sure they get a flu vaccine? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine every year. That includes children from tiny to teen.

Getting a flu vaccine is the best way to prevent the flu. For children younger than 5 years of age and those with certain chronic health conditions, like asthma and diabetes, getting a flu vaccine is especially important to avoid serious flu complications like pneumonia, which can lead to hospitalization and even death.¹ About 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized each year from flu complications. The flu can also make some health conditions worse.

Influenza-related deaths in children are tragic, with nearly half of pediatric deaths occurring in children younger than five years of age. Among the children who died during the 2010-2011 flu season, roughly half had a high-risk medical condition that placed them at higher risk of serious flu complications.² However, the other half did not. This tells us that even previously healthy children can get very sick from the flu and die. The annual flu vaccine recommendation is the same during years, like this one, when the vaccine is made to protect against the same flu strains as the previous season's vaccine.

There are two kinds of flu vaccine available for children: the regular flu shot and a nasal spray flu vaccine, which is for healthy children 2 years of age and older³. Talk to your child's doctor or nurse if you have questions about which type of vaccine your child should receive.

Flu vaccines cannot give you the flu because they are made from killed or weakened influenza viruses. Flu vaccines have an excellent safety record. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines and most people generally do not experience any side effects after being vaccinated. When side effects do occur, they are generally mild and include redness and soreness at the injection site for the flu shot, and occasionally sore throat, runny nose and rarely fever after the nasal spray vaccine. While these symptoms can be uncomfortable and inconvenient, they are mild and resolve quickly when compared to a bad case of the flu.

“Parents who take their children to get a flu vaccine can rest a little easier knowing they are helping to protect their family against a potentially serious illness,” says Dr. Schuchat. “And of course, parents should be vaccinated, too.”

Children 6 months through 8 years of age who did not receive at least one dose of the 2010-2011 vaccine, or for whom it is not certain whether the 2010-2011 vaccine was received, should receive 2 doses of the 2011-2012 flu vaccine. The second dose (booster dose) should be given 4 weeks after the first.

Once vaccinated, the body needs two weeks to produce antibodies for protection against the flu. Children, and everyone else, should get a flu vaccine as soon as they are available in their community. This will help provide early protection for the season. The vaccine does not provide protection against non-flu viruses that can cause colds and other respiratory illnesses similar to the flu, however.

Babies younger than 6 months are too young to get a flu vaccine, but they are at higher risk for complications, hospitalization and death from the flu. Therefore, it is important that family members and other people who care for young infants get vaccinated to help ensure that they don't spread the infection to them. “It's important that all family members and caregivers get a flu vaccine to ‘cocoon’ infants,¹” says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC's Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

Flu vaccines are offered in many convenient locations. For example, you can get them for yourself and your child from your doctor or pharmacist, at local health clinics, and at flu clinics at local retail outlets.

For more information about the flu and the benefits of the flu vaccine, talk to your doctor or nurse, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>, or call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).

1 CDC. Children, the flu, and the flu vaccine. Seasonal influenza (flu) website. October 7, 2011. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm>.

2 CDC. Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths --- United States, September 2010--August 2011. MMWR Weekly. September 16, 2011 / 60(36);1233-1238.

3 Flu.gov. Vaccination. Undated. <http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/vaccination/index.html>.