
Children, the Flu, and the Flu Vaccine

The Danger of Flu to Children

Flu is more dangerous than the common cold for children. Each year, seasonal flu places a large burden on the health and well-being of children and families.

- Children commonly need medical care because of influenza, especially before they turn 5 years old.
- Each year an average of 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized because of influenza complications.
- Flu seasons vary in severity, however some children will die from flu each year. From 2003-2004 to 2009-2010, pediatric deaths reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ranged from 46 to 153 per year. During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, more than 340 deaths in children were reported to CDC from April 26, 2009 to May 22, 2010.
- Severe influenza complications are most common in children younger than 2 years old.
- Children with chronic health problems like asthma and diabetes are at especially high risk of developing serious flu complications.

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Recommendations

CDC recommends that all children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday get a seasonal flu vaccine. This is because it is the *single best way to protect against seasonal flu and its potential severe complications in children.*

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against three influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. The 2010-2011 flu vaccine will protect against 2009 H1N1, and two other influenza viruses (an H3N2 virus and an influenza B virus). Two doses of flu vaccine may be needed for children ages 6 months to 9 years. Talk to your doctor, nurse or clinic for advice.

Children at Greatest Risk

Certain groups of children are at increased risk for seasonal flu complications. Children at greater risk of serious flu-related complications include:

1. Children younger than 6 months old

The flu vaccine is not approved for use in infants younger than 6 months old; however, the risk of flu complications is higher in these young infants than it is for any other age group among children. The best way to protect children younger than 6 months is to make sure members of their household and their caregivers are vaccinated.

2. Children aged 6 months up to their 5th birthday

It is estimated that each year in the U.S., there are more than 20,000 children younger than 5 years old who are hospitalized due to flu. Even children in this age group who are otherwise healthy are at risk simply because of their age. In addition, children 2 years of age up to their 5th birthday are more likely to be taken to a doctor, an urgent care center, or the emergency room because of flu than healthy older children. To protect their health, all children 6 months and older should be vaccinated against the flu each year. Vaccinating young children, their families, and other caregivers can also help protect them from getting sick.

3. Children aged 6 months and older with chronic health problems, including:

- asthma or other problems of the lungs;
- immune suppression;
- chronic kidney disease;
- heart disease;
- HIV/AIDS;
- diabetes;
- sickle cell anemia; or
- long-term aspirin therapy;
- any condition that can reduce lung function (cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders).

CDC also recommends that people in contact with certain groups of children get a seasonal flu vaccine in order to protect the child (or children) in their lives from the flu.

The following contacts of children are recommended for seasonal influenza vaccination by CDC:

- Close contacts of children younger than 5 years old (people who live with them) should get a flu vaccine.
- Out-of-home caregivers (nannies, daycare providers, etc.) of children younger than 5 years old should get a flu vaccine.
- People who live with or have other close contact with a child or children of any age with a chronic health problem (asthma, diabetes, etc.) should get a flu vaccine.
- In addition, CDC recommends that all health care workers be vaccinated each year to keep from spreading the flu to their patients.

For information about other people recommended for vaccination, either because they are at high risk for serious flu-related complications, or because they are contacts of high risk people, visit www.cdc.gov/flu.

When to Get Vaccinated Against Influenza

Vaccination should begin as soon as vaccine becomes available and continue throughout the flu season, into December, January, and beyond. While seasonal influenza outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the time seasonal flu activity peaks in January or later.

Because flu viruses change every year, the vaccine is updated each year. So even if you or your children got a flu vaccine last year, you still need to get a flu vaccine this season to be protected.