

Infection Prevention and You



Parents and families are partners in preventing the flu

Did you know that even in early fall, influenza (also known as flu) viruses are circulating at low levels? In fact, flu outbreaks can happen as early as October. Flu is so highly contagious that it leads to thousands of hospitalizations each year and can even cause death. More than 600 children have died from the flu over the past four years. Kids most at risk are those with underlying conditions such as respiratory, cardiac, endocrine, gastrointestinal, metabolic conditions, genetic syndromes and those with neurologic or neurodevelopmental disorders.

While the flu spreads mainly in the fall and winter months, it's hard to predict how severe the disease will be. During the 2012-2013 season, doctor visits for flu-like illness, hospitalization, and deaths were higher than in previous years. Child deaths from flu can be prevented through vaccination. Unfortunately, only 55 percent of children were vaccinated last season. Up to two-thirds of children receive their annual vaccination from their doctor's office.

Protect infants: get your flu vaccine!

In the United States, approximately 4 million children are born each year. Infants less than six months old cannot receive the vaccine. That's why it's important for pregnant women to be vaccinated because when they are immunized, they pass the protection to their infants during the first six months of life. Protecting the young and vulnerable is known as "cocooning." This means that everyone who comes in contact the vulnerable, including family members, household contacts, siblings and healthcare workers should be vaccinated.

Most parents know that children can easily spread viruses. The highest rates of transmission during outbreaks occur in school-aged children. During the 2009-2010 flu pandemic, 64 percent of children who died of the flu had a neurologic condition. Many may not realize that children with intellectual disabilities are especially prone to adverse effects of catching the flu.

Influenza can be a deadly disease for healthy children, most especially in the very young and those vulnerable with underlying health conditions. According to the CDC:

- Everyone 6 months and older needs flu vaccine every year.
- Remember, when a child is receiving the flu vaccination for the first time, two doses are needed to for the protection against the virus to be effective. Wait four weeks between the first and second dose.
- Two to three flu strains have changed from last season.
- Quadrivalent (four strains) flu vaccines now available.
- Children with egg allergies SHOULD be vaccinated. A special flu vaccine called Flublock does not contain any traces of egg. Talk to your healthcare provider about this option.

Additional Resources

Flu.gov – Flu prevention and vaccination <http://www.flu.gov/prevention-vaccination/index.html>

Flu.gov – Who's at risk? <http://www.flu.gov/at-risk/index.html>

Flu.gov – How the flu virus changes http://www.flu.gov/about_the_flu/virus_changes/index.html

CDC – How the flu spreads <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/spread.htm>

NFID – Prevent childhood influenza <http://www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/>

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