



FACT SHEET

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, 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.
- Some children will die from the flu each year. During the 2007-08 flu season, CDC received reports that 86 children died from influenza-related complications.
- 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.

Vaccination Recommendations

Vaccination is the best method for preventing flu and its potentially severe complications in children.

CDC recommends that all children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday get a flu vaccine.

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

The following contacts of children are recommended for 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)

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Children at Greatest Risk

Certain groups of children are at increased risk for 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 child age group. 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).

When to Get Children Vaccinated

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

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

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Special Instructions for Children Being Vaccinated Against Flu for the First Time

Children 6 months up to 9 years of age getting a flu vaccine **for the first time** will need two doses of vaccine the first year they are vaccinated. If possible, the first dose should be given in September or as soon as vaccine becomes available. The second dose should be given 28 or more days after the first dose. The first dose "primes" the immune system; the second dose provides immune protection. Children who only get one dose but who need two doses can have reduced or no protection from a single dose of flu vaccine. Two doses are necessary to protect these children. If your child needs two doses, begin the process early, so that children are protected before influenza starts circulating in your community. Be sure to follow up to get your child a second dose if they need one. It usually takes about two weeks after the second dose for protection to begin.

Because flu viruses change every year, the vaccine is updated annually. So even if you or your children got a flu vaccine last year, you both still need to get a flu vaccine this season to remain protected. If October and November slip by, and you haven't gotten your children or yourself vaccinated, get vaccinated in December or later.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu, or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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