

Protecting Your Child: Influenza

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW



Every year flu causes up to 52,000 deaths & 710,000 hospitalizations in the U.S. - most of which are vaccine preventable.



The Vaccine

The flu vaccine is reformulated each year by the FDA and WHO to match the strains expected to be most common that season. This is why annual vaccination is so important - last year's shot may not fully protect against this year's strains.

How it works:

- Most flu vaccines contain inactivated (killed) flu viruses.
- The nasal spray vaccine (FluMist) contains a weakened live virus.
- Both prompt your immune system to produce antibodies against the flu strains most likely to circulate that season.

Dosage:

- 1 dose every year for everyone 6 months and older
- Children under 9 receiving a flu vaccine for the first time:
 - 2 doses, given 4 weeks apart
- Best time to vaccinate: September - October before flu season peaks

Side Effects:

- Mild and temporary: soreness at the injection site, low-grade fever, or mild muscle aches for 1-2 days. The nasal spray may cause brief runny nose or congestion.
- These are normal signs your immune system is responding.

What is Influenza (Flu)?



Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory virus that causes fever, chills, muscle aches, sore throat, runny nose, and fatigue. It spreads easily through the air and

by touching contaminated surfaces. Flu can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization and death, especially in young children, older adults, and people with chronic conditions.

Most people recover within a week, but flu can cause serious complications even in previously healthy children.

Who is most vulnerable?

Children under 5 (especially under 2), adults 65 and older, pregnant people, and those with asthma, heart disease, diabetes, or weakened immune systems.

Is the Vaccine Safe? Yes.

- Approved annually by the FDA after rigorous review.
- Hundreds of millions of doses administered safely in the U.S. each year.
- **Decades of real-world safety data** across all age groups.
- The **flu vaccine cannot give you the flu** - this is a common myth
- **No link to long-term illness** or developmental problems in children.

Support & Guidance

Your pediatrician or family doctor can help you choose the right flu vaccine formulation for your child and advise you on catch-up schedules. Flu vaccines are also available at most pharmacies and community health clinics.

Trusted Resources: [AAP HealthyChildren.org](https://www.aap.org/healthychildren)

Alternatives?

- There is **no safe alternative** to annual vaccination for preventing influenza.
- **"Getting the flu"** is not safer than the vaccine - natural infection carries real risks of serious complications, missed school, and missed work.
- Antiviral medications (like Tamiflu) can reduce severity if taken early, but are **not substitute for prevention**.



Bonus: Getting a flu vaccine during pregnancy protects newborns who are too young to be vaccinated. Antibodies pass through the placenta and breast milk.

Getting a flu vaccine every year is one of the simplest, most effective things you can do to protect your family. We're here to answer your questions and celebrate the protection you give your community.