

Immunization Facts for Families

Influenza

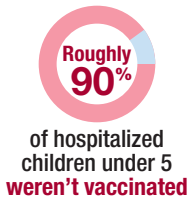
Updated September 3, 2026

All children 6 months and older are recommended to receive an annual influenza (flu) vaccine (ideally by the end of October). The vaccine helps your child's immune system recognize and resist the virus so they can remain healthy.

The flu vaccine protects your child from:

- Symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills, muscle aches, and fatigue
- Serious health issues such as inflammation of the heart, brain, and muscles, organ failure, pneumonia, and death.

Annual flu vaccination helps your child's immune system recognize and resist the virus so they can stay in school, go on playdates, and do the things kids love doing. Some people still get the flu after getting vaccinated, but they usually have a milder case. Each year, thousands of children under age 5 are hospitalized with flu complications. Roughly 90% of hospitalized children weren't vaccinated. The flu can be especially serious for kids under 5 or those with conditions like asthma or diabetes.



Who should receive the flu vaccine and when?

- All children 6 months of age and older during each flu season (ideally by the end of October). Children getting the flu vaccine for the first time will need 2 doses, unless they are 9+ years old.

There are 2 types of flu vaccines:

- A shot (injection), recommended for children 6 months and older.
- A nasal spray, which is available for children at least 2 years old and healthy.

Children can still receive the vaccine if they have a minor illness, like a cold, on the day of vaccination. Tell your child's doctor or care team about any symptoms of illness, medical conditions and medications that they take.

How does flu spread?

Influenza viruses can spread rapidly through communities. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, others around them can inhale the virus through the nose or mouth. The virus can also spread when a person touches a contaminated surface, such as a door handle, and then



puts their hands or fingers in their nose or mouth or rubs their eyes. In the United States, flu most often spreads from fall through spring.

Flu viruses change over time, and different strains circulate each year. The flu vaccine is updated every year to keep up with these changes. That's why kids (and adults) need a new flu shot every year.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Common side effects of the flu shot may include soreness, redness, and swelling where the shot was given, as well as fever, muscle aches, and headache. There may be a very small increased risk of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a condition that can cause numbness and muscle weakness. The risk of experiencing GBS after influenza infection is higher than the risk of GBS after influenza vaccination. If your child has a history of GBS, talk with their doctor about the flu vaccine.

Common side effects of the nasal spray flu vaccine may include runny nose, nasal congestion, wheezing, or headache. Vomiting, muscle aches, fever, sore throat, and cough are other possible side effects of the nasal spray flu vaccine.

These symptoms are usually mild and short-lived. The flu vaccine **does not cause the flu**.

Although most flu vaccines contain small amounts of egg proteins, children with egg allergies can safely receive them without an increased risk of allergic reaction.



Learn more

If you have questions about vaccines and keeping your child healthy, talk with your pediatrician.

Visit www.healthychildren.org/flu for more information on flu vaccines from the AAP.

View and download AAP Immunization Fact Sheets at www.aap.org/IZFactSheets.

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