

Influenza

INFLUENZA AND INFLUENZA VACCINE

Influenza each year causes tremendous amounts of school absence among older children and serious illness among preschool children. Symptoms during influenza may include headache, stomach ache, fever, vomiting, and cough, and complete recovery from them may take weeks or months. Influenza may also lead to pneumonia, ear infection, and other complications, and it may make a child more susceptible to illness long after the influenza itself seems to have disappeared. Influenza is particularly troublesome for those who have serious allergies or other chronic diseases.

We recommend influenza vaccine for children with a past history of repeated pneumonia, asthma, or frequent ear infections. Any child who has diabetes, congenital heart disease, or chronic lung disease should have influenza vaccine. Others living in the same household with these high risk children should also receive influenza vaccine. Children who are generally more healthy may be given influenza vaccine to reduce the risk of illness and school absence during the flu season. Influenza vaccine may be expected to decrease the likelihood of getting influenza, or make it less severe with complications less likely.

Reactions to influenza vaccine are generally mild, but some swelling and soreness at the site of injection and mild fever and muscular pains may sometimes occur. Those who have developed hives, swelling of the tongue, or other severe reactions after eating eggs should not be given influenza vaccine.

Children 6 months through 8 years of age, if they have not had previous influenza vaccine, are best protected with two doses of influenza vaccine given a month or more apart. Others receive a single dose. Influenza vaccine is not recommended under 6 months of age. It may be given at the same time as other immunizations.

Influenza vaccine should be scheduled in September, October, or November, and the second dose, if recommended, should be given before December. Influenza vaccine needs to be given each year, since protection does not last from flu shots or illness the previous years.

Now a new alternative nasal influenza vaccine is available, known as FluMist. FluMist is currently available for children age 5 and older and adults under age 50 who do not have underlying chronic disease. See the link to this product for further information at <http://www.flu-mist.com> Children and adults with chronic respiratory disease must still receive the traditional injectable influenza vaccine.

In addition to prevention, Influenza can be treated with a highly effective antiviral drug known as Tamiflu (oseltamivir). The earlier influenza is diagnosed the more effective Tamiflu is at relieving symptoms. If you think your child may have the flu (See our link "Is it a Cold or the Flu?") have your child see your doctor early so they might benefit from this medication. Waiting in this case will render the drug less effective and the child will progress through a full course of the disease undeterred. Read more about tamiflu at <http://www.tamiflu.com>