

# The Flu Vaccine

## Protection from the flu Peace of mind for you



As a parent, you do everything you can to protect your children. Buckle them up in the car. Watch them closely when they're in the water. Teach them to look both ways when they cross the street. Warn them not to talk to strangers.

How about making sure they get the flu vaccine? CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get the flu vaccine every year. That includes children from tiny to teen.

Getting the flu vaccine is the best way to prevent flu. For children younger than 5 years of age and those with chronic health conditions, like asthma and diabetes, getting the flu vaccine is especially important to avoid serious flu complications like pneumonia, which can lead to hospitalization and even death.<sup>1</sup> About 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized each year from flu complications. Flu can also make some health conditions worse.

Babies younger than 6 months are too young to get the flu vaccine, but they are at higher risk for complications and death from flu. Because of this, it is important that family members and other people that care for young infants get vaccinated to help ensure that they don't transmit the infection to them. "It's important that all family members and caregivers get the flu vaccine to 'cocoon' infants,<sup>1</sup>" says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC's Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

The 2009 H1N1 flu (so named for the year the virus was identified) hit children particularly hard last year, and that virus is expected to be around again this year. The 2010-11 flu vaccine includes protection against the 2009 H1N1 flu virus, along with two seasonal flu viruses expected to circulate this season.<sup>1</sup>

There are two kinds of flu vaccine: the flu shot and a flu nasal spray vaccine. These vaccines cannot give you the flu because they are made from killed or weakened influenza viruses. Flu vaccines have an excellent safety record. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely

gotten flu vaccines and most people generally do not experience any side effects after getting a flu vaccine. When side effects do occur, they are generally mild and include redness and soreness at the injection site for the flu shot, and occasionally sore throat, runny nose and rarely fever after the nasal spray vaccine. While these symptoms can be uncomfortable and inconvenient, these symptoms are mild and resolve quickly when compared to a bad case of the flu.

"Parents who take their children to get the flu vaccine can rest a little easier knowing they are helping to protect their family against a potentially serious illness," Dr. Schuchat said. "And of course, parents should be vaccinated, too."

Children should get the flu vaccine as soon as possible to ensure early protection for this flu season. Most children 6 months through 8 years will need to get 2 doses of the vaccine, the second dose (booster dose) 4 weeks after the first. Healthy children ages 2 and older can get the nasal-spray vaccine instead of a flu shot.<sup>2</sup> Talk to your child's doctor or nurse if you're not sure. Once vaccinated, the body needs two weeks to produce antibodies for protection against the flu. The vaccine does not provide protection against non-flu viruses that can cause colds and other respiratory illnesses.

Check with your doctor, pharmacist, or local health clinic about getting you and your child vaccinated from flu.

**For more information about the dangers of flu and the benefits of the flu vaccine, talk to your doctor or nurse, visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov), or call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).**

<sup>1</sup>CDC. Children, the flu, and the flu vaccine. Seasonal influenza (flu) website. August 3, 2010. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>Flu.gov. Vaccination. Undated. <http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/vaccination/index.html>.