

# The Importance of Flu Vaccine for Children

*[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Karen Hunter] Welcome. I'm your host Karen Hunter. Today we're talking about the importance of flu vaccines for all children, including those with special healthcare needs. Joining me today is Dr. Lisa Grohskopf, a medical officer in CDC's Influenza Division, and Dr. Georgina Peacock, a pediatrician with CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Grohskopf let's begin with you. Why is it so important for children to be vaccinated against seasonal flu?

[Lisa Grohskopf] Because children 5 years old and younger, especially those who are younger than 2, are at high risk of developing serious complications if they become sick with flu. Some of these complications include pneumonia, dehydration, worsening of medical problems such as heart disease, asthma, sinus problems, or ear infections. In rare cases, complications from the flu can even lead to death.

[Karen Hunter] Flu vaccination is always important, but why is it even more important this year?

[Lisa Grohskopf] COVID-19 is still circulating, and the combination of that along with seasonal flu could lead to more illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths than usual. This could overwhelm the capacity of medical systems, including hospitals, to treat patients. Getting a flu vaccine for your child and yourself is the best way to protect your family against flu this season.

[Karen Hunter] Dr. Peacock, what about children with special needs? Why is it so important for them to be vaccinated against flu?

[Georgina Peacock] Children with neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy, intellectual disability, or muscular dystrophy are at higher risk of developing serious complications if they become sick with flu. One reason is that children with these conditions sometimes have trouble with muscle or lung function and difficulty with coughing, swallowing, or clearing fluids from their airways. These complications can be life-threatening. We learned much from the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, including that more than 40% of children reported to have died with flu-related causes had an underlying neurologic condition and the most common conditions being intellectual disability and epilepsy. A yearly flu vaccine can help protect children with these conditions in many cases by reducing their risk of getting sick with flu.

[Karen Hunter] Yet only about half of parents of children and youth with special health care needs report they vaccinate their children against flu, according to a CDC survey.

[Georgina Peacock] Yes that's correct, Karen. A survey of parents and doctors found that only half of children with neurologic or neurodevelopmental conditions received their yearly flu vaccine. The survey also found that many pediatricians were unaware that children with these conditions—including intellectual disability—were at higher risk for serious complications from flu.

[Karen Hunter] Dr. Grohskopf, what are CDC's recommendations for flu vaccinations for children?

[Lisa Grohskopf] Flu vaccine is recommended for all children 6 months of age and older. Children who are 6 months through 8 years old may need two doses of flu vaccine to be fully protected if they're getting vaccinated for the first time or have previously only received one dose of vaccine. Those children who do need two doses should get these doses of flu vaccine spaced at least four weeks apart and get the first dose as soon as possible once vaccine becomes available. Children who just need one dose should get their flu vaccine in September or October because it takes two weeks after vaccination before they are fully protected. However, as long as influenza viruses are circulating, it is never too late to get a flu vaccine for your child or yourself. It's best to speak with your physician and follow their guidance regarding flu vaccination for your child.

[Karen Hunter] Thanks to both of you. To learn more about the importance of flu vaccination for children, which children are at higher risk of serious complications from flu, and much more, visit CDC's influenza website at [cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/parents.htm](https://cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/parents.htm).

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information visit [cdc.gov](https://cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.*