

Roughly 59% of children vaccinated against flu last season

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Influenza vaccination rates for children under age 2 years are meeting national goals but fall short for older children, new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [data](#) show.

“We’re good at vaccinating those younger kids, but your teenager is just as important,” said Patricia A. Stinchfield, R.N., M.S., C.P.N.P., C.I.C., senior director of infection prevention and control at Children’s Minnesota. “Our goal is to increase coverage for children of all ages as every child deserves to be protected.”

Stinchfield was among several experts at a National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) press conference Thursday who highlighted the potentially serious complications of flu and urged vaccination as the new season begins.

“Vaccines are among the greatest health achievements of modern times, but only as useful as we as a society take advantage of them,” said U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Thomas E. Price, M.D.

[AAP policy](#) calls for children ages 6 months and older to be vaccinated with either trivalent and quadrivalent inactivated flu vaccines. Quadrivalent live attenuated flu vaccine (nasal spray) is not recommended.

During the 2016-’17 flu season, 46.8% of people in the U.S. were vaccinated, up from 45.6% the previous season. Rates for children were 59%, virtually unchanged from 59.3% the previous two seasons, according to the CDC. Pediatric rates were highest for those under age 2 (76%) and lowest for teens (49%). They also varied widely by state, ranging from 43% in Wyoming to 74.2% in Rhode Island.

A recent [study in *Pediatrics*](#) found flu vaccine reduces the risk of flu-related deaths by 65% for healthy children and 51% for children with chronic conditions.

Last season, 105 children in the U.S. died of influenza-related causes, according to Stinchfield. For children under 5, annual hospitalizations since 2010 have ranged from 7,000 to 26,000. Among all ages during that time, flu has been linked to 140,000 to 710,000 hospitalizations and 12,000 to 56,000 deaths annually.

Emphasizing the seriousness of the virus, Stinchfield said, “the words ‘just’ and ‘flu’ should not be in the same sentence. Unless of course you’re going to say ‘I just got my flu vaccine.’”

It is especially important for adults who come in contact with children to be vaccinated, including family members and health care personnel.

About 53% of pregnant women were vaccinated before or during pregnancy last season, according to NFID Medical Director William Schaffner, M.D. Among health care personnel, about 78% were vaccinated with the highest rates among those working in hospitals.

“It’s critically important we lead by example by getting vaccinated to protect our patients and ourselves,” Dr. Schaffner said.

Resources

- [CDC’s “Take 3” campaign to fight flu](#)
- [AAP News story “New flu guidance reiterates importance of vaccine for everyone 6 months and older”](#)
- [AAP News story “How to code for influenza vaccine in the 2017-’18 season”](#)
- [HealthyChildren.org information for parents on flu](#)

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