

CDC: Flu vaccination rates improved, still too low

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About 46% of children have been vaccinated against flu this season, an improvement from this time last year but still too low, according to federal health officials.

“A lot of people, children and adults, remain unvaccinated and we really need to focus on getting them vaccinated. And the sooner the better,” said Ram Koppaka, M.D., Ph.D., associate director for adult and influenza immunization in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) Immunization Services Division.

The CDC and the Academy recommend everyone six months and older get vaccinated against the flu. Inactivated influenza vaccine is the primary vaccine choice while quadrivalent live attenuated influenza vaccine may be used for children who would not otherwise receive a vaccine, according to [AAP policy](#).

[CDC surveys found](#) that as of mid-November, nearly 46% of children had been vaccinated up from about 39% at the same time last year. The highest rates were among those age 6 months to 4 years (57%) followed by ages 5-12 (46%) and teens (35%).

The adult vaccination rate also increased, with 45% receiving the flu shot compared to 39% last year.

Dr. Koppaka said the improvements year may have been due in part to the severe 2017-'18 season in which 185 children died from flu-related illness. Children and older adults especially vulnerable to complications.

“Very, very young children have weaker or underdeveloped immune systems and therefore are going to be more susceptible to the effects of viral illness,” Dr. Koppaka said.

Outpatient visits for flu still are at baseline but are expected to rise. So far this fall, influenza A (H1N1) pdm09 has been the most common virus.

“The type of influenza that has been predominantly circulating to this point is a type that was more preventable by the vaccine in last year’s experience, so it just underscores the importance of getting vaccinated,” Dr. Koppaka said.

The CDC recommends physicians ask about vaccination status at each visit, make a strong recommendation and ensure patients know the potential consequences of not protecting themselves.

“I think providers need to be open with their patients and also persistent,” Dr. Koppaka said. “If the first conversation doesn’t result in vaccination, that doesn’t mean the conversation is over. It just means (additional) conversation is required.”

Resources

- ["Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Influenza in Children, 2018-2019"](#)
- [AAP News story "How to code for flu vaccine, administration in 2018-'19 season"](#)
- [Information from the CDC about flu](#)
- [Information for parents on flu vaccine from HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [AAP News stories on flu](#)
- [Pediatrics seasonal flu article collection](#)

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