

# Flu Vaccines

Hilliard Pediatrics, Inc. - Dr. Tim Teller, MD

## Introduction

The flu vaccine helps prevent **Influenza**, a respiratory viral illness. Influenza infects thousands and thousands of people of all ages each year. There are different strains of influenza and these change from year to year. The **classic case of influenza** starts suddenly and includes fever (typically 101-102 but not unusual to be even 105- 106 degrees), achiness, sore throat, runny nose, headache, and a severe cough. Only about half of the people that get sick with influenza have the classic symptoms. Although vomiting and diarrhea illnesses are often called the “stomach flu”, the influenza virus does not cause them. The symptoms start 1-4 days after being exposed and last 2-6 days. Adults can spread the flu virus to others through coughing, sneezing, and touching objects around them for about 6 days and children for 10 days after the illness starts (even after someone feels better). The most common complication with influenza is bacterial pneumonia. Young children with influenza can also become dehydrated. Overall, 36,000 people in the U.S.A. die each year from influenza. Over 90% of those that do die are 65 years of age and above. Children with asthma, heart conditions, diabetes, and other chronic conditions are more likely to become very ill with influenza. The usual influenza season in Ohio is November through March or April.

Flu vaccines can greatly reduce the chances of getting influenza, spreading influenza, or getting very ill with influenza. The flu vaccine only lasts in our body for about 12 months, so the vaccine **needs to be given every year to keep us protected.**

## Flu Vaccines

There are two types of flu vaccine. Which one is “better” has not yet been decided but is being studied. Both have an 8 or 9 out of 10 chance of preventing the flu and a 6 out of 10 chance of preventing someone from being hospitalized from the flu although this can vary from year to year.

Name	How Given	Approved for this Age	For High Risk Groups
Inactivated ("Fluzone®")	Injection (shot)	6 months of age and above	Yes (asthma, diabetes, others)
Live Attenuated ("Flumist®")	Nose Spray	2 years and above	No

The flu shot does contain **egg protein** and we need to make a decision if someone is known to be egg allergic whether the possibility of a reaction outweighs the protection from the flu vaccine. The flu shot (not the nose spray) does contain a very tiny amount of thimerosal as a preservative, an amount that is thought by national experts and our office to be safe.

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## Common Side Effects

Common side effects of the flu shot are soreness where the shot was given, low grade fever, and achiness. Common side effects of the nose spray are mild runny nose, headache, and sore throat.

## Vaccine Schedule

The flu shot is typically **available** each Fall from September until we no longer have it available (depending on the supply, but usually November to January). The supply of the flu vaccine in this country is an issue each year. Many years, we and other offices will not receive as much flu vaccine as we would like. The flu nose spray is available earlier, often in the Summer, and can be given throughout the influenza season.

If a child is less than 9 years of age and they have never had 2 doses in one year, they will need two doses one month apart. For children 9 and above and children who have received two doses in one year, one dose is required. If your child is only able to receive one dose of the vaccine due to the supply, they will still have good protection. National experts agree it is better to have many children have one dose if the supply is low rather than some children get two doses with others not having even one dose.

Since 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that **the flu vaccine be given every year to every child** 6 months of age to 18 years of age. We agree with this recommendation. Who should not get the flu vaccine: a child less than 6 months of age or highly allergic to eggs.

Your child may receive the vaccine at a routine check-up or other office visit (if not too ill at the time) or at one of our walk-in flu vaccine clinics each flu vaccine season. The dates and times of these are posted on our website and in our office. You may also call during regular business hours for more information.