



What Parents Need to Know About Flu

Flu is more dangerous than the common cold for children. Each year flu places a large burden on the health and well-being of children and their families.

Flu is dangerous for children

Flu illness is more dangerous than the common cold for children. Each year, millions of children get sick with seasonal flu; thousands of children are hospitalized, and some children die from flu. Children commonly need medical care because of flu, especially children younger than 5 years old.

- [Complications from flu](#) among children in this age group can include:
 - Pneumonia: an illness where the lungs get infected and inflamed
 - Dehydration: when a child's body loses too much water and salts, often because fluid losses are greater than from fluid intake)
 - Worsening of long-term medical problems like heart disease or asthma
 - Brain dysfunction such as encephalopathy
 - Sinus problems and ear infections
 - In rare cases, flu complications can lead to death.
- Flu seasons vary in severity, however every year children are at risk
 - CDC estimates that from the 2010-2011 season to the 2019-2020 season, flu-related hospitalizations among children younger than 5 years old have ranged from 7,000 to 26,000 in the United States.
 - While relatively rare, some children die from flu each year. From the 2004-2005 season to the 2019-2020 season, flu-related deaths in children reported to CDC during regular flu seasons have ranged from 37 to 199 deaths. (During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, 358 pediatric flu-related deaths were reported to CDC from April 2009 to September 2010.) It is noteworthy that among reported pediatric deaths, about 80% of those children were not fully vaccinated. Also of note, even though individual flu deaths in children must be reported to CDC, [it is likely that not all deaths are captured](#) and that the number of actual deaths is higher. CDC has developed statistical models that account for the underreporting of flu-related deaths in children to estimate the actual number of deaths. During 2019-2020, for example, 199 deaths in children were reported to CDC but statistical modeling suggests approximately 434 deaths may have occurred. More information about pediatric deaths since the 2004-2005 flu season is available in the [interactive flu web application](#).

The best way to prevent flu is with a [flu vaccine](#). CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a seasonal flu vaccine each year, ideally by the end of October. Children can get vaccinated as soon as vaccine becomes available—even if this is in July or August. However, as long as flu viruses are circulating, vaccination should continue throughout flu season, even in January or later. More information on flu vaccination timing is available below. Keep in mind that vaccination is especially important for certain people who are higher risk of developing serious flu complications or who are in close contact with higher risk persons. This includes children at higher risk of developing complications from flu illness, and adults who are close contacts of those children. Flu vaccines are updated each season to protect against the four influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.