

Which Flu Vaccine Should Children 2 to 8 Years Old Get?

Children 6 months and older should get an annual influenza (flu) vaccine. A flu vaccine is the best way to prevent the flu. Some flu vaccines come as a “shot” and some as a “nasal spray.” While the flu shot and the nasal spray vaccine both protect against the flu, there is evidence that the nasal spray vaccine may work better in younger children than a regular flu shot. CDC now recommends the nasal spray vaccine for healthy children 2 to 8 years when it is available.

This fact sheet answers questions about the CDC recommendation.

Questions & Answers

Why should I get my child vaccinated?

Each year, many children get sick with the flu; some are hospitalized and some die. Young children are the most likely to get sick with the flu. Children younger than 5 years old are at high risk of getting serious flu complications. Vaccinating your child is the best way to protect them.

Why should I get my child 2 to 8 years old a nasal spray flu vaccine if it is available?

Recent studies suggest that the nasal spray flu vaccine may work better than the flu shot in younger children. Specifically in these studies, the nasal spray flu vaccine prevented about 50% more cases of flu than the flu shot in younger children.

What if my provider does not have the nasal spray vaccine for my child 2 to 8 years old?

If the nasal spray vaccine is not immediately available, get the flu shot for your child to protect them from the flu. Don't delay vaccination if you can't find nasal spray flu vaccine.

Why might it be difficult to find nasal spray vaccine?

Typically, there are more flu shots and a smaller amount of nasal spray flu vaccines. If the nasal spray flu vaccine is not available or is not appropriate for your child, the flu shot is recommended.

Should all children 2 to 8 years old get the nasal spray vaccine?

No. Some children 2 to 8 years old should **not** get a nasal spray vaccine. This includes:

- Children who are getting aspirin therapy, or taking medicines that contain aspirin;
- Children who have a weakened immune system (immunosuppression);
- Children with a history of egg allergy;
- Children 2 to 4 years old who have had asthma or wheezing during the last 12 months;
- Children who have taken influenza antiviral medications (for example, Tamiflu® or Relenza®) within the last 48 hours.

These children may be able to get a flu shot instead.

There are other precautions for the nasal spray vaccine:

- Children with asthma who get the nasal spray may have an increased risk of wheezing
- The safety of the nasal spray vaccine in children with other health conditions that put them at increased risk of serious flu complications (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, neurological conditions, etc.) has not been established.

Check with a health care provider if you have questions about which vaccine your child should get.



About 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu every year.





If my child is older than 8 years, which flu vaccine should they get?

CDC does not recommend one vaccine over the other for children older than 8 years.

If my child is younger than 2 years, which flu vaccine should they get?

Children 6 months to 2 years of age should get a flu shot.

What viruses does the nasal spray flu vaccine protect against?

All nasal spray flu vaccines are made to protect against four flu viruses: an influenza A (H1N1) virus, an influenza A (H3N2) virus, and two influenza B viruses.

Where can I find the nasal spray flu vaccine?

To find out what types of flu vaccines are offered in your area, call your doctor, pharmacy, or other local health facility; or use the HealthMap Vaccine Finder at <http://vaccine.healthmap.org/>

How many doses of nasal spray flu vaccine will my child need?

Regardless of the type of flu vaccine your child gets, some children up to 8 years of age will need two doses of flu vaccine to be fully protected. Usually this will apply to children getting a flu vaccine for the first time. The two doses should be given at least 28 days apart. Your child's doctor can tell you whether your child needs two doses.

If my child needs two doses of vaccine, do both doses have to be the same kind of vaccine?

No. Whether your child's first dose is a nasal spray vaccine or a flu shot, their second dose can be either one of the two vaccines.

Can the nasal spray flu vaccine give my child the flu?

No. While the nasal spray flu vaccine does contain live viruses (unlike the flu shot, which contains killed viruses), the viruses in the nasal spray vaccine are weakened and **cannot cause flu illness**. The flu shot cannot cause flu illness either.

Can the nasal spray flu vaccine be given to my child when they are ill?

The nasal spray flu vaccine can be given to people with minor illnesses (e.g., diarrhea or mild upper respiratory tract infection with or without fever). However, if your child has nasal congestion (a "stuffy nose"), your doctor may suggest delaying vaccination until the nasal congestion has improved.

How effective is the nasal spray flu vaccine in children?

As with all flu vaccines, the effectiveness of nasal spray flu vaccine can vary, depending on a number of factors, including the age and health of the person being vaccinated and how similar the viruses used to make the vaccine are to the viruses that are circulating. Some studies have shown, however, that the nasal spray flu vaccine may work better in younger children than the flu shot.

What side effects are associated with the nasal spray flu vaccine?

In children, side effects can include runny nose, headache, wheezing, vomiting, muscle aches, and fever. These side effects can sometimes be mistaken for the flu, however, they are usually mild and short-lasting, especially when compared to flu illness.

Annual flu vaccination is the single best way to protect your child against the flu. Get your child vaccinated this season. And remember, it's important that everyone around them get vaccinated, too!

For more information about the nasal spray flu vaccine, go to www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/nasalspray.htm.