Flu season is here: Is your family protected?

Thinking about skipping the flu shot for yourself or your child this year? Think again.

The flu vaccine is the single best way to prevent getting the flu virus. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants and children ages 6 months and older get the flu vaccine every year. The shot is especially important for children with ongoing health problems and women who are or will be pregnant, recently delivered or are breastfeeding. People who live with or take care of children younger than 5 years of age or a child of any age with ongoing health problems also should get the vaccine.

Even if you and your children are healthy, you can catch the flu. Although you may recover just fine, you could spread the virus to someone who may get seriously ill because they are very young, very old or have an ongoing health problem. Each year, 20,000 children under age 5 are hospitalized because of problems from the flu.

Children who get the flu are more likely to have serious problems if they have diseases such as asthma, diabetes, heart problems, a condition of the brain or spinal cord, cerebral palsy, seizure condition, stroke, an intellectual disability, developmental delay or muscular dystrophy.

Two types of flu vaccines are available for children. One is given as a shot. The other is a nasal spray that can be given to healthy, non-pregnant people ages 2-49 years. Children with ongoing health problems should not get the nasal spray vaccine.

Children ages 6 months to 8 years who get the vaccine for the first time will need a second flu shot at least 28 days later. Most children who have egg allergy also can have a flu shot. Parents of these children should talk to their pediatrician about options.

Some people believe they will catch the flu from the vaccine. This is not true. Flu vaccines are made from inactivated or weakened virus or no virus at all. Children may feel sore in the spot where they were vaccinated and a bit achy. A low fever is possible but rare.

Parents should contact their pediatrician if their child with chronic illness has flu symptoms. Prescription medicines may help prevent serious problems for these children if given soon after symptoms appear.

The flu virus spreads from early fall until May. Make an appointment with your pediatrician now to get flu shots for your children. Or search for nearby locations offering vaccines at http://flushot.healthmap.org/.


— Trisha Korioth