



## News Articles, Infectious Diseases, Influenza, Vaccine/Immunization

### CDC: 53 children have died from flu

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Editor's note: An updated flu story is available at <http://www.aappublications.org/news/2018/02/09/flu020918>.

The number of children dying from flu this season continues to rise, now reaching 53, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Right now, one of the biggest health threats we are facing is influenza," CDC Acting Director Anne Schuchat, M.D., said Friday. "Flu is incredibly complex and difficult to predict, and this season is a somber reminder of why flu is one of the world's greatest public health challenges."

Young children are especially vulnerable to flu complications. Sixteen pediatric deaths were reported during the week ending Jan. 27, according to new CDC data. During a regular season, pediatric flu deaths have ranged from 37 to 171 and spiked to 358 during the 2009 pandemic.

About 20% of children who died this season had been vaccinated, and roughly half did not have an underlying condition, according to the CDC. Signs of a potentially serious case include high fever, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, significant tiredness or confusion, and feeling better then getting worse.

Across all ages, flu-related activity rose to 7.1% of outpatient visits in clinics and emergency department visits in the most recent week, up from 6.6% the week before. It is the third highest rate in the past 15 years, CDC officials said. In addition, hospitalizations rose to 51.4 per 100,000 population, the highest since tracking started in 2010.

Dr. Schuchat stressed it is not too late to get a flu shot this season as it can help protect from severe illness. However, the effectiveness of the vaccine has been called into question repeatedly this season. Researchers in Canada recently found vaccine effectiveness against H3N2 strains to be 17%, following a study in Australia that found effectiveness of 10% against such strains.

Dr. Schuchat said she expects effectiveness for H3N2 to be "in the same range" as Canada. The CDC will release preliminary effectiveness estimates for the U.S. in a few weeks.

"We have been expecting low effectiveness against the H3N2 strains, but it's too soon in the season to be sure how things will all end up because we are seeing increases in H1N1 and B components where the vaccine effectiveness is often higher," she said.

She also addressed recent news reports of severe side effects of antiviral drugs and said a great deal of research has been done on risks and benefits.

"The fears about very severe side effects of antivirals to my knowledge haven't really held up in robust examination, so we think at this point for people at risk of severe problems of influenza, particularly when the treatment can begin relatively soon, that antivirals are recommended," she said.

Shortages of antiviral medications have been reported in some areas, but manufacturers have said they have enough product overall.



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### Resources

- [AAP policy "Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Influenza in Children, 2017 - 2018"](#)
- [Information from the CDC about flu](#)
- [Information for parents on flu vaccine from HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [AAP News stories on flu](#)
- [The CDC will hold a webinar on flu for clinicians at 2 p.m. Eastern on Feb. 18.](#)