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Don't chance it: Annual flu shot will cut children's risk of illness

by Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Every parent has been there. You received email reminders about a flu shot clinic, but didn't get a chance to make an appointment. Now your child has come down with a fever over 101 degrees Fahrenheit, headache, chills, sore throat and dry cough. Time to call the school absence line.

All children 6 months of age and older should be immunized against influenza every year. The flu shot reduces the chance that your child will have to visit the doctor's office for treatment by 30% to 60%. The average case of flu can last a week or more. Children under age 5 years and those with chronic health conditions are at greater risk of problems from the flu.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children ages 6 months to 8 years receive two doses of influenza vaccine their first season, given four weeks apart. Thereafter, only one shot a year is needed. Children ages 9 years and older should receive one dose. It is safe for children with egg allergy to receive the influenza shot, according to the AAP.

Two types of flu vaccine are offered - a shot and a nasal spray (FluMist).

The AAP recommends the flu shot as the best choice for children this season. However, the nasal spray may be used for children who are healthy and at least 2 years old if they wouldn't get vaccinated otherwise (e.g., they refuse the shot).

To sidestep the flu in your family this season, follow these tips:

- Get a flu shot as soon as possible, preferably by the end of October. It is difficult to know when the virus will be at its peak in your community.
- Get a booster shot for children under age 9 years who are receiving the vaccine for the first time.
- If you think your child is at risk of serious problems from the flu, call your pediatrician to see whether he should receive an antiviral medicine.

For more information about the types of influenza vaccines, visit <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Prepare-Your-Family-for-Flu-Season.aspx>.

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