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AAP News

CDC encourages flu vaccines in children after decline last season

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor



Federal health officials say they are concerned about a drop in flu vaccine coverage among children, especially given the potential for flu to make a comeback this season.

About 59% of children got a flu vaccine last season compared to 64% the previous season, according to a [new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). The lowest rates were among teenagers.

The decline likely was due to a disruption in routine medical visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. It came on the heels of a record-breaking 2019-'20 flu season in which 199 children died, 80% of whom were unvaccinated.

"We know flu vaccines can be lifesaving," CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky, M.D., M.P.H., said during a press conference Thursday. "I hope we can reverse the drop in vaccination coverage we saw among children and protect our children this season with a flu vaccine."

The AAP and CDC recommend everyone 6 months and older gets vaccinated. Flu vaccines can be co-administered with COVID-19 vaccines for people ages 12 years and older.

Among children, coverage was highest for those under 5 years at 68% and lowest for teenagers at 51%, according to the CDC report. About 60% of White children were vaccinated compared to 49% of Black children.

Overall, about 52% of people 6 months and older in the U.S. were vaccinated last season, similar to the previous season. About 56% of White people were vaccinated compared to 43% of Black people and 45% of Hispanic people, CDC data showed.

"These differences are simply unacceptable and contribute to overall poorer outcomes among minority communities," Dr. Walensky said. "Given this lower vaccination coverage and the higher risk of serious flu outcomes, it is particularly important we reach people in these racial and ethnic minority populations and encourage vaccination and ensure flu vaccine is easily acceptable."



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There was little flu activity in the 2020-'21 flu season, likely due to COVID-19 precautions like masking, social distancing and staying home, Dr. Walensky said. But as people start to relax those precautions, flu could start to spread again. The CDC already has seen an increase in other respiratory illnesses like respiratory syncytial virus, and Dr. Walensky said little disease last year means lower population immunity for this season.

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) released new survey results Thursday showing 44% of U.S. adults do not plan to get a flu vaccine this year or are unsure. Nearly one in four at high risk for complications do not plan to get vaccinated. The most common reasons for turning down a vaccine were thinking it doesn't work well or that people won't get the flu.

NFID Medical Director William Schaffner, M.D., called on people to get vaccinated every season and use mitigation measures like washing their hands, covering their cough, wearing a mask in public and staying home if they are sick. They also should take antiviral drugs if prescribed.

"Flu vaccines work," Dr. Schaffner said. "While vaccine effectiveness of course can vary from season to season, even if you do get the flu, the vaccine can prevent you from going to the emergency room, being hospitalized or dying."

Resources

- [AAP policy "Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Influenza in Children, 2021-2022"](#)
- [Information from the CDC about flu](#)
- [Information for parents on flu vaccine from HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [AAP News stories on flu](#)
- [Information on flu from the AAP Red Book](#)