



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Get Children Vaccinated for Influenza

Influenza Vaccination Coverage of Children Aged 6-23 months United States, September-December, 2005-06 Influenza Season

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[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds. Influenza season is almost here again. While the virus affects people of all ages, children under 2 years of age are at increased risk for influenza-related hospitalizations. The CDC recommends that in particular, children 6 to 23 months old should be vaccinated against the flu. Dr. Jeanne Santoli of CDC is here to discuss this recommendation. Dr. Santoli, welcome to the show.

[Dr. Santoli] Thanks, Matthew. I'm glad to be here to talk with you about how we can protect young children against influenza.

[Matthew Reynolds] Why is influenza more dangerous to children 6 to 23 months of age than older children?

[Dr. Santoli] Well, it's interesting. A lot of people think of influenza as a disease of the elderly, but in fact what we've learned is that children who are very young are more likely to be hospitalized. Particularly, children who are less than 2 years of age.

[Matthew Reynolds] This is the second flu season CDC has made this recommendation. Last year, the rates of vaccination for this age group were low. Why is that?

[Dr. Santoli] Well, there are probably a couple of reasons why the rates of vaccination are low. First, it's kind of a new recommendation and it takes a little while for a new vaccine or a new recommendation for an old vaccine to be implemented. And, so we know that it's important for providers and parents to get the word that this is an important recommendation for young children. But in addition, unlike other vaccines, influenza vaccination needs to happen in a fairly short window of time; not all year round. It happens starting in September through about January, and that's different than other vaccines and it makes it more challenging to get all children vaccinated.

[Matthew Reynolds] What does CDC suggest to increase these rates or numbers of vaccinations?

[Dr. Santoli] Well, something that's important of course is getting the word out - that CDC can do that and state and local health officials and the professional societies that work with providers. Because we need to make sure that providers and the public know

how serious the disease is in young children, know how well the vaccine works, and know that it's a safe vaccine. But there are also some strategies that can be used in doctor's offices; strategies that can remind parents that a child is due or over due for a vaccine or can remind a provider that a certain child should be offered influenza vaccine. And, these kinds of strategies have been shown to increase vaccination coverage in young children.

[Matthew Reynolds] You mention these strategies. Can parents have their children vaccinated against flu at the same time they have their other required vaccinations?

[Dr. Santoli] That's a great question. It's certainly safe to give influenza at the same time as other vaccines, but because there's a limited window when we're giving influenza vaccine, if your child isn't due to have their regular vaccines during that window they may need another visit. So I recommend that parents would talk to their health care providers to find out when their provider will be offering influenza vaccinations upcoming in the fall.

[Matthew Reynolds] For most of us, we're used to getting a flu shot. But CDC's recommending two doses for children who are vaccinated for the first time, if they are less than nine years old.

[Dr. Santoli] Yes, it's very important and something that people might not realize about flu vaccines for young children. And that is that when children are less than 9 and they're being vaccinated for the first time, they actually need two doses of vaccine spaced at least a month apart in order to be fully protected. When we look at the vaccine coverage from our recent report, we see that among children who are 6 to 23 months of age who got vaccinated, only two thirds received both vaccines that they were suppose to receive. That means a third of those children got vaccinated but weren't fully protected because they didn't receive their second vaccine.

[Matthew Reynolds] Parents with children under 6 months of age are probably wondering about the risks of flu to their children and what precautions they should take. What do you recommend?

[Dr. Santoli] Well, that's a really important question because children less than 6 months of age are probably at the highest risk of complications from influenza among all children. But yet they're too young to be protected through vaccination. So we recommend vaccinating the people who are close to them - their household members like brothers and sisters and parents, and their out of home caregivers, like daycare providers.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Santoli, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

[Dr. Santoli] Thank you. I was glad to be here.

[Matthew Reynolds] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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