

FLU PREVENTION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Overview

During the 2020-21 flu season, obtaining a flu vaccine is more important than ever. Child care programs can work with families and employees to increase vaccine coverage. Typically, flu season spans Fall and Winter in the United States, with 39-56 million individuals contracting flu in the 2019-2020 season¹ and 24,000-62,000 deaths, 188 of which were children.² Children and child care providers are at increased risk for contracting flu due to their group setting. Further, children under five are at higher risk of developing flu-related complications.³ In addition, child care workers typically have low rates of flu vaccination due to a variety of issues centered around access to affordable health care, perceptions about vaccine effectiveness and mistrust of the health care system.⁴

This year, flu season is further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. When everyone receives a flu vaccine, this can reduce the burden on the health care system as the health care systems continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, reductions in flu help the health care system as it continues to address the COVID pandemic, freeing up health care resources for those with COVID. health care resources for those with COVID.

Who Should Get a Flu Vaccine?

All individuals over six months old should receive a flu vaccine during the 2020-2021 flu season, unless they have a medical condition that prevents them from receiving a vaccine. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children age 6 months through 17 receive at least one dose of flu vaccine by the end of October.⁵ Children age 6 months through age 8 who are receiving the vaccine for the first times should receive two doses of the flu vaccine; older children only need one dose. Similarly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all adults and children over 6 months get vaccinated for flu in September or October.⁶

1 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. (Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report. (2020, September 25). Retrieved September 28, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>

2 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. (Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report. (2020, September 25). Retrieved September 28, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>

3 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. (2020, September 22). Flu & Young Children. Retrieved September 24, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/children.htm>

4 De Perio, M., Wiegand, D., & Evans, S. (2012, April). Low influenza vaccination rates among child care workers in the United States: Assessing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Retrieved September 23, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4532262>

5 American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Infectious Diseases. (2020, September 01). Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Influenza in Children, 2020-2021. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2020/09/14/peds.2020-024588>

6 Grohkopf, L. A., Alyanak, E., Broder, K. R., Blanton, L. H., Fry, A. M., Jernigan, D. B., & Atmar, R. L. (2020, August 20). Prevention and Control of Seasonal Influenza with Vaccines: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices - United

Flu vaccines are generally available at no cost adults and children with employer-based or government-sponsored health insurance. Health professionals at federally funded health care centers also can provide vaccines to eligible individuals without insurance (search for a health center here: <https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>). Despite the wide availability of safe flu vaccines, in the 2018-2019 flu season, vaccination rates remain relatively low - approximately 63% of children and 45% of adults received flu vaccines.⁷ These factors are very concerning, as the flu vaccine is a safe and effective way to deter the spread of flu. Even in instances where the vaccine may not be 100% protective, individuals who have been vaccinated and contract the flu have had reduced symptoms and illness severity.



Special Considerations during COVID-19

The 2020-21 flu season is occurring amid the COVID-19 pandemic. While several COVID-19 vaccines are in trial, widespread availability likely will not occur until well into or after this flu season. Many individuals may be weary of accessing health care due to fears of contracting COVID-19 in health care settings. In fact, many children have fallen behind on other routine vaccines due to reductions in pediatric health care service visits. Fewer families are going to see their pediatrician due to provider closure, limited appointment availability and/or fear of accessing services during the pandemic.⁸ This season presents an opportunity for children to get caught up on key preventive health care services such as vaccines and other screenings when they visit their pediatrician for a flu shot.

When the COVID vaccine is eventually approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), it is likely to be offered first to those who have the highest rates of morbidity and mortality. Therefore, it is important that providers and families follow guidelines outlined by the CDC and FDA, and ask their health care provider for the latest advice on when to access a COVID vaccine.

States, 2020–21 Influenza Season. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/rr/rr6908a1.htm?s_cid=rr6908a1_w

7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Flu Vaccination Coverage, United States, 2018–19 Influenza Season. (2019, September 26). Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/coverage-1819estimates.htm>

8 Daley, J. (2020, July 08). Vaccinations Have Sharply Declined Nationwide during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/vaccinations-have-sharply-declined-nationwide-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Recommendations for Child Care Programs

Child care programs can help prevent flu in various ways. First, encourage staff to get the flu vaccine to limit spread. Second, continue diligence related to sanitation and disinfection.⁹ Safe child care facilities can help control the spread of both flu and COVID-19.

Many of the COVID-19 and flu symptoms are similar. This symptom checklist can help staff determine if a child or care provider's symptoms align with most common flu or COVID-19 symptoms. CCAoA also developed a decision tree for child care programs to reference when children under their care becomes sick. This resource can help programs decide what to do if a child or care provider becomes sick.

Resources

General Flu Information

[CDC Digital Media Toolkit: 2020-21 Flu Season](#), CDC, 2020

[Flu vs COVID-19.docx](#), Child Care Aware, 2020

For Families

[Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Influenza in Children, 2020-2021](#), AAP, 2020

[Protect Against Flu: Caregivers of Infants and Young Children](#), CDC, 2020

[Flu Information for Parents with Young Children](#), CDC, 2020

[Prepare-Your-Family-for-Flu-Season](#), AAP, 2020

For Providers

[Teaching Children About the Flu](#), CDC

[Cleaning and Disinfection in Child Care Programs](#), Child Care Aware, 2020

[Coronavirus: How Does It Impact Child Care Providers and CCR&Rs?](#), Child Care Aware, 2020

[Why Child Care Staff Need to Care About Flu Prevention](#), Child Care Aware, 2017

[E-Book: Infectious Disease in Child Care](#), Child Care Aware, 2019.

[Creating a Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan: A Guide for Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes](#), CDC, 2020.

[What To Do if a Child Becomes Sick at Child Care or Reports a New COVID-19 Diagnosis](#), Child Care Aware, 2020

[COVID-19 vs Flu Symptoms](#), Child Care Aware, 2020

[What To Do When A Child Is Sick](#), Child Care Aware, 2020

⁹ Coats, J. (n.d.). Cleaning and Disinfecting in Child Care Programs. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://info.childcareaware.org/blog/cleaning-and-disinfecting-in-child-care-programs>