



News from Nurse Abbe

Fall 2020

This is a hectic back-to-school season for many families – but don't be tempted to put off your child's flu shot. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it's important to get kids vaccinated for the flu as soon as possible.

This year, kids should get their flu shot as soon as possible.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children get vaccinated for the flu in September or October. Because of the pandemic, most pediatricians recommend aiming for September.

- Flu season starts as early as October – but it takes a few weeks for a vaccine to do its work in the body to create immunity. By getting a flu shot in September, your child's immune defenses can be in place before the flu becomes widespread in the community.
- The CDC does not anticipate any flu shot shortages this year, but pediatricians' schedules fill up quickly. Plan ahead to make sure your child gets vaccinated before their doctor's calendar is full.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever to get flu shots.

When we get sick with one virus, our immune systems are weakened, and it puts us at a higher risk of catching another virus. That means that this year, there's a risk of getting both the flu and coronavirus.

- If your child catches COVID-19 and has *not* had their flu shot, they may wind up sick with both illnesses at once. On the other hand, if your child *has* had their flu vaccine, they're much less likely to catch the flu – and because they'll be healthier overall, they'll also be less likely to catch COVID-19.
- There's a bigger picture here: By preventing a major flu outbreak, we free up hospital beds and staff to care for coronavirus cases if there's a surge. So, we need to take every safety measure to keep ourselves and the people around us healthy. That means getting a flu vaccine to minimize the risk of flu, and (while we wait for a COVID-19 vaccine) wearing a mask and social distancing to minimize the risk of coronavirus.

Kids (and adults) should get a flu vaccination every year.

- Vaccines become less effective over time, so the shot your child got last year will no longer do a good job protecting them.
- There are often several different versions of the flu going around, and last year's shot may not cover all of them. This year's vaccine covers four flu strains, and three of the four strains were not in last year's flu vaccine.

Some kids will need a second vaccination, or a booster shot.

Your pediatrician will know your child's individual needs. Here are some of the reasons your child might need a second vaccination – either weeks or months after their first flu shot.

- **It's their first flu shot, and they're under age 8:** Children typically receive their first flu shot when they're about 6 months old, but even if your child is up to age 8 and it's their first time, they'll need a second dose about four weeks later. This is because young kids' immune systems don't respond as strongly to vaccines as older kids and adults. The first flu shot "primes" their immune system, and the second shot helps it actually develop the antibodies it needs to fight off the virus. (For the same reason, if your child is under age 8 and only previously gotten one dose of flu vaccines, they should get two doses of vaccine.)
- **Immunocompromised:** The immune system's response to a vaccine wears off with time. For kids with a typical immune system, this isn't a problem: A flu shot in September will get them through all of flu season, as late as April or May. But a child who is immunocompromised (whose immune system is weakened, either by a disease or a medication) will need a booster shot, probably around January, to ensure their immune system is protected through the end of flu season. Talk to your child's doctor to decide the right plan.

When you schedule your child's flu vaccination, catch up on their other health needs.

- Schedule a well visit with their pediatrician.
- Schedule any specialty care you've been putting off – in many cases, you can connect with our pediatric experts right from home on telemedicine
- If your child needs medical attention, don't wait for a wide range of pediatric care, not just emergencies – including when your child's regular doctor isn't available.