

Kids with neurological conditions at higher risk of flu death: CDC

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Medical, parenting groups working to increase flu vaccination, awareness.

(HealthDay)—Children with neurologic disorders such as cerebral palsy, intellectual disability or epilepsy are at increased risk of dying from flu, a new study says.

The findings highlight the importance of [influenza vaccination](#) to protect these children, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Researchers analyzed data on influenza-related deaths among children younger than 18 during the 2009 H1N1 [swine flu pandemic](#). The number of flu-related deaths during the pandemic was more than five times the median number of children's deaths reported in the previous five flu seasons.

Sixty-eight percent of those deaths occurred in children who had underlying medical conditions that elevate the risk of serious [flu complications](#).

Information was available for 336 of the children with underlying medical conditions who died from 2009 H1N1 flu-associated causes. Of those, 227 had one or more underlying health conditions. One hundred forty-six (64 percent) had a neurologic disorder.

Of the children with neurologic disorders for whom vaccination information was available, only 23 percent had received the seasonal [flu vaccine](#) and only 3 percent were fully vaccinated for the 2009 H1N1 flu.

The most commonly reported complications for children with neurologic disorders were flu-associated pneumonia and acute [respiratory distress syndrome](#). The researchers also found that 75 percent of children with a neurologic condition who died from 2009 H1N1 flu-related infection had an additional high-risk condition for flu complications, such as a lung disorder, metabolic disorder, heart disease or chromosomal abnormality.

The study appeared online Aug. 29 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

"We've known for some time that certain [neurologic conditions](#) can put children at high risk for serious complications from influenza," Dr. Lyn Finelli, chief of the surveillance and outbreak response team in CDC's Influenza Division, said in an agency news release. "However, the high percentage of pediatric deaths associated with neurologic disorders that occurred during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic was a somber reminder of the harm that flu can cause to children with neurologic and neurodevelopmental disorders."

Flu is particularly dangerous for people who have trouble with muscle

function, lung function or difficulty coughing, swallowing or clearing fluids from their airways, study co-author Dr. Georgina Peacock, of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, said in the news release. "These problems are sometimes experienced by children with neurologic disorders," she said.

CDC is partnering with the American Academy of Pediatrics and influenza advocacy groups to promote awareness about the importance of flu prevention and treatment in children with neurologic disorders.

More information: The U.S. Center for Disease Control and prevention has more about [children, the flu, and the flu vaccine](#).

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