

When parents get vaccinated, their kids do too

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(HealthDay)—When parents get a flu shot, their kids are more likely to

be vaccinated against not only the flu, but also other diseases, new research reveals.

Investigators first focused on the [flu vaccine](#), and found that the kids of parents who got the [flu shot](#) were nearly three times more likely to get the shot themselves.

But the trickle-down effect did not stop there.

When parents got flu shots, they were also more likely to make sure their kids were vaccinated against other diseases, especially the human papillomavirus (HPV). The HPV [vaccine](#) protects against several cancers, including cervical cancer in women and penile cancer in men.

And the reverse held true.

"Parents who chose not to immunize themselves for influenza were more likely to have [children](#) who weren't immunized against other diseases, such as HPV," said study lead researcher Steve Robison, from the Oregon Health Authority's Immunization Program in Portland.

With the flu shots, the association was seen for all ages of children, including teens, although the link was weaker for infants whose vaccinations are also driven by well-baby visits, Robison said.

When parents who had been getting flu shots stopped getting them, their children were almost twice as likely to miss being vaccinated for the flu, the researchers found.

On the flip side, when parents who hadn't been getting a flu shot got one, their children were over five times more likely to get a flu shot, Robison said.

The findings were published online April 17 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

"Immunizing children is important to stop the spread of flu to seniors and other vulnerable people," said Robison.

Yet, flu immunization rates among children are lower than the rate needed to stop the circulation of the [disease](#), he said.

Every [flu season](#), parents are encouraged to immunize their children, but this largely ignores parents as role models, Robison said.

"In order to improve childhood immunization rates for diseases such as influenza, we also need to encourage parents to get immunizations for themselves," he said. "Immunization needs to be promoted for everyone in a family, starting with parents and adults."

Dr. Amanda Porro, a pediatrician at Nicklaus Children's Hospital in Miami, agreed that the study shows how important [parents'](#) attitudes are when it comes to childhood vaccinations.

"Vaccine rates are on the decline, particularly the flu vaccine, which needs to be given every year," said Porro said.

Part of the decline is caused by people who are anti-vaccine, she explained.

"Flu vaccine seems to be the one that takes the hit most often," Porro said. "Vaccination to prevent life-threatening disease is not just for children, it's for the whole family."

So far this year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that more than 1,200 cases of mumps have been reported across the country. Other recent outbreaks include: pertussis ("whooping cough") in

2012 that infected more than 48,000 people; and measles, which started at Disneyland and infected 188 people in 2015.

These diseases are preventable by vaccines, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

"High-immunization rates in your community provide a buffer of protection that makes it harder for diseases to break through," AAP President Dr. Fernando Stein said in a statement.

"Vaccines are the best way to protect your own child from diseases, and they also keep communities healthy by protecting children who are too young to be vaccinated, or those who have compromised immune systems," he explained.

"Simply put," Stein said, "vaccines save lives."

More information: Steve Robison, M.P.H., Oregon Immunization Program, Oregon Health Authority, Portland; Amanda Porro, M.D., pediatrician, Nicklaus Children's Hospital, Miami; statement, American Academy of Pediatrics; April 17, 2017, *Pediatrics*, online.

For more on the flu vaccine, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/).

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