

Combo of COVID plus flu can bring severe illness to kids

December 16 2022, by Steven Reinberg



Kids who get the flu and COVID-19 together may be in for a serious,

even deadly, bout of illness, U.S. health officials said Friday.

So far, infections with both viruses in children have been rare because last flu season was mild, but this one could see dramatic uptick in coinfections, according to a New York City-based expert.

[Dr. Marc Siegel](#), a clinical professor of medicine at NYU Langone Medical Center, said this flu season is shaping up to be a severe one, and COVID is also surging.

"This is a bad flu season and COVID is coming back," Siegel said. "We shouldn't assume that someone who has the flu doesn't have COVID—they might have both, so testing for both makes sense. This is a reminder for emergency room physicians that if you diagnose somebody with flu, be sure they don't have COVID, too."

Although the 2021-2022 [flu season](#) was mild, some children did get flu and COVID-19 together. Of those who were hospitalized, many were severely ill and some died, according to a [new report](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Preliminary data indicate that 6% of [kids](#) hospitalized for flu between Oct. 1, 2021 and April 20 of this year also had COVID, the report said.

In all, 44 flu-related deaths were reported in kids, including seven (16%) who were also fighting COVID, according to the CDC.

Researchers noted that a higher percentage of kids with coinfections needed respiratory or ventilator support compared to those with flu alone.

More than 80% of those coinfecting kids hadn't gotten a flu shot, according to the CDC. In all, 53% had received antiviral flu treatment.

Of seven coinfecting patients who died, none was fully vaccinated against flu and only one received flu antivirals, the CDC said.

Information on their COVID vaccination status and treatment was not available.

The CDC recommends that children get both flu and COVID shots, starting at 6 months of age. The CDC also recommends kids wear face masks when these viruses are circulating.

Siegel lamented that few [children](#) in the study were given antiviral medications to fight the flu even though these drugs are "very effective." He said antiviral drugs are also effective in fighting COVID and should be widely used.

"I'm pro-vaccine," Siegel said. Children should get their yearly [flu shot](#) and now also get vaccinated against COVID-19, he added.

Parents who are concerned about these shots should have a thorough discussion with their pediatrician about the benefits and risks of getting vaccinated or not, Siegel said.

Vaccinations are especially important for kids who are more likely to develop complications from flu and COVID-19, he said. These include kids who are obese or who have [chronic conditions](#) such as asthma, type 2 diabetes or any autoimmune disease.

Siegel predicts that annual flu and COVID shots will become standard, as both diseases are likely to be around, especially in the winter.

"Definitely, there's going to be a yearly vaccine for COVID and flu," he said.

He urged everyone who is eligible for these vaccines to get them or discuss them with their doctor.

"The number of pediatric deaths is low, but the risk of the vaccine is much lower than the risk of the virus, that's the bottom line," Siegel said.

The new research was published Dec. 16 in the CDC's [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#).

More information: For more on the flu, see the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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