

What a Mayo Clinic pediatrician says about the flu vaccine and kids

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Young children and older adults are particularly susceptible to severe flu-related illness. That's why Dr. Angela Mattke, a pediatrician with Mayo Clinic's Children's Center, says it's important that kids and adults get

their seasonal flu vaccine. She says you should get vaccinated well before the holidays because it takes two weeks for the flu vaccine to become fully effective.

Health experts say you should get your flu shot as soon as it's available in your area. This will give your body time to create defenses against the flu.

"It takes two weeks to get protection against influenza. So, if you're exposed to influenza in that meantime, you may get an infection," says Dr. Mattke.

And you also may spread a virus. Dr. Mattke says the vaccine doesn't completely prevent illness.

"What it does is offer you protection against really serious complications: needing to go to the [emergency department](#), needing to be admitted, going to the ICU or, in some serious situations, death," she says.

Two flu shots for some children

Some children six months to age eight may need two flu shots. It's important to work with your health care team.

"But if it's your infant's first year of being eligible for the influenza vaccine, I would anticipate that they get two vaccines separated by four weeks," Dr. Mattke says.

If your child is scared of vaccinations, there is an alternative to the shot for some kids. The flu mist is approved for people ages two to 49.

The [flu vaccine](#), she says, can save lives.

"In children specifically, the influenza vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of death by over 75%. And so, for my children, I want to do everything I can to try and give them as much protection as possible against influenza," Dr. Mattke says.

Hand hygiene

In addition to getting vaccinated, it's important to keep your hands clean and avoid contact with sick people to stay healthy and prevent the spread of illnesses. Help children learn the when and how of hand-washing. Encourage them to wash their hands with [warm water](#) and soap for at least 20 seconds before meals, after visiting the restroom, and following sneezing or coughing.

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