

New guidelines call for kids, health care workers to get flu shots

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Pediatric group pushes seasonal vaccine as essential for these groups.

(HealthDay)—All eligible children and health care workers should get flu shots, according to new policy statements from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

"Parents must consider flu vaccine an essential vaccine for their children," Dr. Wendy Sue Swanson, an AAP spokeswoman, said in a news release from the pediatric group.

"Now is the time to call your pediatrician and make an appointment, or find out when flu clinics start. Flu vaccine is a critically important, every-year vaccine that can protect your child from very serious illness and death due to a virus that is so often common in our communities, and so common in childhood," said Swanson. She is executive director of Digital Health at Seattle Children's Hospital in Washington.

In previous years, about 90 percent of children in the United States who died from the flu were unvaccinated. During last year's flu season, 145 children in the United States died from the flu, and many of them had no other health problems.

Dr. Henry Bernstein, author of both policy statements, said, "Flu vaccine is the best way we have to protect children against this virus.

"The [flu virus](#) is unpredictable. We cannot always anticipate how severely it will affect different groups of people. Being immunized with the flu vaccine every year significantly reduces the risk of your child being hospitalized due to flu, and it protects other vulnerable members of your family and community," said Bernstein, who is professor of pediatrics at Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine in Hempstead, N.Y.

The AAP recommends that annual flu shots should be given to all people 6 months of age and older. Children aged 6 months to 8 years require two doses this flu season if they have received less than two doses of flu vaccine before July 2015.

Flu shots are recommended for all people who have contact with children younger than 5 years of age and [children](#) with high-risk conditions. Pregnant women are at high risk for flu-related complications and can safely receive flu vaccination at any time during pregnancy. Getting a [flu shot](#) during pregnancy also protects infants for the first 6 months of life, the statements said.

The AAP also noted that many people at high risk for flu and related complications require regular medical care, meaning they have frequent, close contact with [health care workers](#). By getting flu shots, health care workers reduce the risk they pose to these vulnerable patients.

"Employees of health care institutions have an ethical and professional obligation to act in the best interest of their patients' health," Bernstein said. "For the prevention and control of influenza, we must continue to put the health and safety of the patient first."

In the 2013-14 [flu season](#), 75 percent of U.S. health care workers received [flu](#) vaccinations, well below the Healthy People 2020 target of 90 percent. Voluntary programs are less effective than mandatory programs, which can achieve [health](#)

[care](#) worker vaccination rates higher than 94 percent, according to the AAP, which repeated its call for mandatory vaccination for health workers nationwide.

The policy statements were published online Sept. 7 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [seasonal flu vaccination](#).

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