



Tips for Speaking with Parents about Flu Vaccine

How to Address Common Concerns

I heard the flu shot can give you the flu.

- Flu vaccines are made with killed or weakened viruses that cannot give you the flu.
- Sometimes the body's immune response after vaccination can make some people feel a little ill, and that's normal. For example, some kids may get a slight fever, but that's their body responding and building antibodies to protect them from the flu.

My child got vaccinated last year and still got sick.

- Many other germs cause symptoms similar to flu—your child might have caught one of them.
- Flu vaccine takes 2 weeks to work. Your child may have been infected with flu or another virus before developing immunity.
- Flu vaccines are not 100% effective. However, even if your child catches the flu, the illness will be much less severe.

Flu vaccine is not effective. Why bother?

- Flu is very serious and can cause pneumonia, hospitalization, and death.
- Without the flu vaccine, your child has zero added protection if he/she gets exposed. It's not worth the risk. Healthy children who were vaccinated [lowered their chance of dying from flu by 65%](#). That's pretty remarkable.

My child is healthy and doesn't need a flu shot.

- Flu viruses mutate constantly and change from year to year.
- Every year, healthy kids who have never caught the flu before, suddenly get it.
- Flu can spread easily at school, while playing with friends, or being out in the community.
- I am healthy and got my flu shot. I also immunized my kids, and as your doctor/nurse, I want your family to also be protected.
- Scarlet died from flu complications at age 5; to her mother's regret, she was not vaccinated. Watch [Scarlet's Story](#) and share with clinic staff and parents.

I'm concerned about side effects.

- Vaccines, like any medication, can cause side effects. With flu shots most effects are mild, primarily pain or redness in the arm.
- This should go away quickly. If you have any concerns after getting vaccinated, please call us.

I don't want vaccines with thimerosal/mercury

- Most flu vaccine is thimerosal-free.
- For kids under 3: you'll be getting the vaccine without any thimerosal. Flu vaccine with or without thimerosal is safe and effective.
- Only multi-dose vials contain thimerosal to prevent contamination when needles are inserted into the vial more than once.
- If parents are still concerned, you can show this 3 minute video: [Is there Mercury in Vaccines?](#) by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

The flu is just like a bad cold—it's not serious.

- Flu is sometimes confused with a cold. Flu viruses are not the same as a cold. When a person catches the flu, they often have a fever and body aches; most also have to miss days of work or school. When complications set in, flu can be life-threatening. While babies, pregnant women, those with certain health conditions, and seniors are at highest risk, even healthy children can die from flu.
- More than 900,000 people were hospitalized and about 80,000 people died in the U.S. from flu in the 2017-18 season.

My child is afraid of needles.

- If available, offer the LAIV (nasal spray) flu vaccine.
- Let younger children sit in their parents' laps; practice [distraction techniques](#). Suggest the parent bring a favorite snack, book or toy for comfort.
- Allow an older child to listen to music and ask them to take deep breaths.
- Reassure the parent and their child so they keep calm, and be honest about the pinch.
- Be supportive and offer praise. You can say: "I know you seemed worried about your visit today, but you did it! I'm so proud of you for being so brave! Maybe it will even get a little easier next time."



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