



# 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 in the past and still got sick.

- Many other viruses 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 likely be less severe.

### Flu vaccine is not effective. Why bother?

- Flu is very serious and can cause pneumonia, hospitalization, and death.
- If your child catches flu and COVID-19 at the same time, this can cause serious health complications.
- Getting flu and COVID shots (for those who are eligible) is the best way to keep your child safe and healthy during the pandemic.
- For children who are eligible for COVID-19 vaccine, they can get flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same visit.
- 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 change from year to year.
- Every year, healthy kids who have never caught the flu before, suddenly get it.
- With schools, after-school programs, and recreational centers reopening, getting a flu vaccine is important for your child.
- 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.
- Any mild side effects should go away quickly. If you have any concerns after getting vaccinated, please call us.

### I don't want vaccines with thimerosal/mercury

- For kids under 3: you'll be getting the vaccine without any thimerosal. Flu vaccine with or without thimerosal is safe and effective.
- Most flu vaccine is thimerosal-free.
- Only multi-dose vials contain thimerosal. The thimerosal is used to prevent the growth of bacteria in the vaccine.
- 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, but flu is much more serious. When a person catches the flu, they often have a fever and body aches; they may have to miss days of work or school. Flu can even be life-threatening. While babies, pregnant women, those with certain health conditions, and seniors are at highest risk for flu complications or death, even healthy children can die from flu.
- In the 2019-2020 flu season, influenza sent up to 740,000 people to the hospital with flu complications and caused an estimated 62,000 deaths in the United States.

### My child is afraid of needles.

- If available, and the child is eligible, offer the LAIV (nasa 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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