



Influenza Vaccination in Children by Michael J. Harkness, M.D. Wade-Townend Pediatrics

As fall approaches, most of us dream of crisp autumn days, beautiful fall colors, and the smell of cinnamon and spices mulling over a hot stove. Of course, in pediatrics, one more thought comes to mind - FLU VACCINE!

Our usual summer and fall ritual of identifying high-risk patients and finding ways of delivering flu vaccine to each of them has had a drastic change in 2004. For decades, we have known that hospitalization rates for young children increase dramatically during influenza season (October to early March). Recently, it has been determined that the risk of hospitalization for children younger than 24 months with influenza exceeds even the rate for adults 50 to 64 years, a group for whom routine influenza vaccination has been recommended since 2000. As of this year, both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American College of Immunization Practices (ACIP) have updated their recommendations for routine immunization.

Starting in 2004, routine influenza vaccination is recommended for all children turning 6 to 23 months old during the influenza season. It is also recommended for all household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children younger than 24 months old. This is especially important for contacts of children younger than 6 months old, as these children are too young to vaccinate, but are still at high risk of hospitalization and morbidity from influenza disease.

Some important points to remember:

- The first priority for flu vaccination is still to high-risk children and their household contacts or out-of-home caretakers. High-risk children include those with:
 - Asthma or other chronic pulmonary diseases.
 - Hemodynamically significant cardiac disease.
 - Immunosuppressive disorders or therapy.
 - HIV infection.
 - Sickle Cell disease or other hemoglobinopathies.
 - Diseases requiring long-term aspirin therapy.
 - Chronic renal dysfunction.
 - Chronic metabolic diseases (including diabetes).
- Women in their second or third trimester of pregnancy should also be considered at high risk, and should be vaccinated.
- Children under 9 years of age receiving their first dose of influenza vaccine require two doses, given at least one month apart.
- Influenza vaccine can be given with any of the other standard pediatric vaccines. The live, attenuated influenza vaccine (nasal spray) has not been approved for children under the age of 5 years old, or for any patient with asthma.