

WHAT'S UP DOC?

by Tariq M. Khan, MD, FAAP

Yes! It's that time of the year again...

Summer is rapidly winding down. Children are already in school by the time this edition of PG Magazine is released. That means it is already time to start thinking about getting children vaccinated against the influenza virus to keep them healthy this winter.

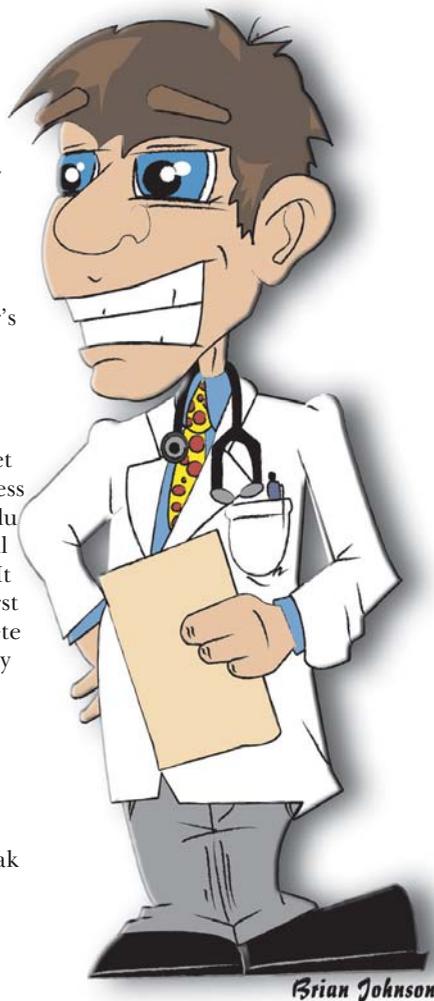
Just because someone was vaccinated last season does not mean that they are covered for this season. Vaccine-induced immunity against influenza lasts only 6-8 months, and every year flu vaccines are different from the prior year.

Each year flu vaccine is made new and is based on predictions by world and regional experts, such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), about the types of influenza virus that will be active in that part of the world in that year's respiratory flu season. This year's flu vaccine will include three types of influenza, as each year's vaccine does. Notably, the H1N1 type, which was a cause of much concern last year, is included in this year's regular flu vaccine.

So what does that mean for children and parents? Children will not have to get two different flu vaccines – just one! In most cases, this means fewer shots unless the child happens to be less than 9 yrs of age or did not receive two doses of flu vaccine last year. In that scenario, two doses of either the injection or the nasal spray/mist given at least four weeks apart will be needed to protect the child. It is important for caregivers and parents to understand that, in this case, the first dose of flu vaccine only primes the immune system and does not offer complete immunity until the second dose is given. It is acceptable in national emergency type scenarios where there is a shortage of vaccine in the early flu season, like last year, to give one dose, so more vaccine is available to cover more people.

According to predictions for this year, there should be plenty of vaccine available for those would like to be vaccinated. Even so, there are still some high-risk groups, such as young children and elderly people, that will be, and usually always are, the first ones given priority for vaccination due to their weak immune systems.

Parents and caregivers should contact their child's medical provider or local health department for specific information, dates of when the vaccines will be available, and who can receive it.



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