



HAWAII STATE
DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH

School-based Seasonal Influenza (flu) Vaccinations Frequently Asked Questions – Media

1) Why are school children being offered free flu vaccine?

The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) believes this important initiative will benefit the health of Hawai'i's school children, families, and communities.

Consider the following:

- School children have very high rates of flu illness, exceeding 10% in most years.
- Influenza outbreaks might be prevented or the severity of illness lessened if a greater proportion of students are immunized.
- Studies show that school children vaccinated against flu have fewer illnesses, fewer absences from school, and lower rates of illness in their families during flu season compared with unvaccinated children.
- Children are one of the most important sources of flu transmission in the community. Older people often catch flu virus from children; therefore, immunizing children may also prevent illness and death in our kupuna.

2) How many school children have been vaccinated through the “Stop Flu at School” program?

During the 2007-08 flu season, over 60,000 students statewide were vaccinated through the “Stop Flu at School” program.

Last year (2008-09 flu season), over 62,000 students statewide were vaccination at school.

3) When will the school flu vaccination program begin this year?

School-based flu vaccinations will begin in October 2009.

4) Who is eligible to receive the free flu vaccine at school?

All students attending kindergarten through the eighth grade, are eligible to receive free flu vaccine at school. Teachers, administrators, and other school staff may also receive the vaccine. All Hawai'i public and private schools will be given the opportunity to participate.

5) Are students required to be vaccinated against flu?

Participation in the school-based program is voluntary and permission from the child's parent or guardian is required. However, parents should know that it is now recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices that all children aged 6 months through 18 years should be vaccinated yearly against flu (see Question #12).

6) What do parents have to do for their children to participate?

Participating is easy! Parents must read the Vaccine Information Statement, choose the type of flu vaccine (Nasal Spray or Shot) that they want their child to receive, and complete, sign, and return the consent form that they receive from their child's school. Forms will be sent home through the schools in early August.

7) Can parents and younger or older children be vaccinated at the school?

No, only children in kindergarten through the eighth grade are eligible for the free flu vaccines. Parents, guardians, and older or younger children may receive their flu vaccine from their regular health care provider or clinic.

8) What if someone is absent when vaccinations are offered?

If a child misses a scheduled school flu vaccination clinic, his/her parent can call their child's regular health care provider to schedule a vaccination appointment. However, the only way to receive a free flu vaccine through this program is at school. Make-up clinic dates will not be scheduled.

9) Who will administer the vaccine?

Trained DOH appointed personnel will administer the flu vaccine.

10) Are flu illnesses serious?

Yes, they can be. All people, no matter how healthy, are at some risk of developing severe and even fatal flu infections.

11) Are healthy children at risk of serious flu illness?

Yes. Although rare, the flu virus can kill children. In the epidemic of 2003-2004, 152 children in the United States died from flu infection; many were previously healthy and not in a high-risk group. The following season, 2004-2005, about 75 children died from flu.

12) Should healthy school children be vaccinated against flu?

Yes. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends yearly flu vaccination for ALL children age 6 months – 18 years. This recommendation should reduce the risk of flu among children, their need for doctors' visits, and missed time from school. Also, decreasing the spread of flu among children may reduce flu among their household members and within the community.

13) Should children with long term health problems be vaccinated against flu?

Yes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends giving a yearly flu shot to children with long term health problems including asthma, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, kidney disease, and blood disorders.

14) Many children dislike needles or shots. Is there another way to get vaccinated?

Yes. In addition to the traditional "flu shot," the nasal spray flu vaccine will be offered.

15) How much will the school-based flu clinics cost?

The total cost for program is estimated at \$2.5 million.* The approximate cost of vaccines is \$1.4 million (purchased with federal funds). The administrative costs (public information, printing, data entry, supplies, shipping, etc.) are estimated at \$1.1 million.

* This estimate will vary based on the number and location of participating schools.

16) Is DOH getting assistance from other organizations to help make the school flu vaccination project a success?

Yes. Many other agencies are assisting DOH in organizing, implementing, and evaluating the school flu vaccination project including:

- Hawai'i Department of Education
- Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools,
- Hawai'i Catholic Schools
- Hawai'i's schools of nursing at Hawai'i Pacific University and the University of Hawai'i
- Hawai'i Medical Services Association
- Kaiser Permanente Medical Center
- U.S. CDC

Others have endorsed the program as a positive contribution to community health including the Hawai'i Chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

17) Are school-based vaccinations a new idea?

No. Several years ago, DOH, the Department of Education, the Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools, and Hawai'i Catholic Schools collaborated on a highly successful statewide hepatitis B vaccination campaign in the schools. This program included virtually every school with 5th graders in the state. Some persons may recall that years ago polio and measles shots were often provided to children in the school setting. Other states, such as Maryland and Tennessee have also held school-based flu vaccinations, although limited to a few counties rather than statewide.

18) Are flu vaccines safe?

Yes. A recent study of the flu shot involving more than 45,000 infants and children found the vaccine is safe in this population. This adds to prior evidence of flu vaccine safety.

19) Can the flu vaccine produce any side effects?

Yes, but they are usually very minor.

The most common side effects following the traditional "flu shot" include soreness, redness, and swelling at the injection site. Occasionally, one might develop a low fever and body aches as your body's immune system responds to the vaccine. If these symptoms occur, they usually only last 1-2 days.

Side effects following the nasal spray flu vaccine are also uncommon but may include: runny nose, congestion, cough, headache, muscle aches, fever, abdominal pain, or occasionally, vomiting and diarrhea. When they occur, these symptoms usually last only a short time and go away on their own.

More facts about the flu vaccine can be found in "[Prevention and Control of Influenza, Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5707.pdf)" at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5707.pdf>

20) Does the flu vaccine work?

Yes. The flu vaccine can prevent about 70-90 of every 100 people who receive it from developing moderate-to-severe flu infection.

21) Can someone get the flu from the flu shot?

No, because the flu vaccine viruses in the flu shot are inactivated, you cannot get the flu from the flu shot.

The live, weakened flu viruses contained in the nasal spray vaccine can sometimes cause mild nasal congestion and runny nose, but because this vaccine cannot grow in the lungs, it cannot cause severe flu complications such as pneumonia.

22) Can someone develop a serious adverse reaction from the vaccine?

Vaccines, like any medicine, may cause severe allergic reactions, but this is very rare. About one of every 2 million people who receive the vaccine may have a severe allergic reaction. Because it is made in eggs, the vaccine contains small quantities of egg proteins. Therefore, people who are allergic to eggs should not receive the flu vaccine.

23) Does the flu vaccine contain thimerosal?

Some do. Most inactivated flu vaccines (“Flu shots”) distributed in the United States currently contain only a small amount of thimerosal as a preservative. The nasal spray flu vaccine does not contain thimerosal.

24) Is it safe for children to receive a flu vaccine that contains thimerosal?

There is no scientific evidence of harm caused by the small amount of thimerosal in vaccines. The following websites provide additional information: US Food & Drug Administration (<http://www.fda.gov/cber/vaccine/thimerosal.htm#t1>) or CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vacsafe/concerns/thimerosal/faqs-thimerosal.htm>).

25) Why do you need to get vaccinated against the flu every year?

Flu viruses change from year to year, so you can get the flu many times during your lifetime. The immunity** that you develop from having had the flu in the past does not protect you from new strains that come along from year to year. Also, last year’s vaccine was made specifically to protect you from flu virus strains circulating a year ago, so it may not protect you against this year’s strains. That is why the flu vaccine gets updated every year.

26) What is the Hawai’i Immunization Registry?

The Hawai’i Immunization Registry is a free service of the Hawai’i State Department of Health for people living in Hawai’i. It is a secure computer system that stores and tracks patient immunization records and makes them available to doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers. For more information, visit the [Hawai’i Immunization Registry website](#) or call (808) 586-4665 (Oahu) or 1-888-447-1023 (Neighbor Islands).

** natural protection that develops against a disease after a person has had that disease