



HAWAII STATE
DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH

School-based Seasonal Influenza (flu) Vaccinations Frequently Asked Questions – Parents/Guardians

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 illnesses 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 can 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 vaccinated at school.

3) Who can receive the free flu vaccine at school?

All students attending kindergarten through the eighth grade, are eligible to receive the 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.

4) Can home schooled students receive the free flu vaccine?

No. The school-based vaccination program, as designed, will be able to reach more than 98% of all kids ages 5-13 years. The health of home schooled children is very important, but it is not yet possible to create a separate delivery system outside of the school setting. Parents of home schooled children can access influenza vaccinations through their regular health care provider.

5) When will the vaccine be given?

School-based flu vaccinations will begin in October 2009. Each school will have its own clinic date and time. Your child's school will notify you of the specific clinic dates.

6) What do I have to do for my child to get the flu vaccine at school?

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

7) What if my child is absent when vaccinations are offered?

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

8) Can my younger or older children and I be vaccinated at the school, too?

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 the flu vaccine from their regular health care provider or clinic.

9) 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.

10) 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.

11) Should healthy school children be vaccinated against flu?

Yes. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends yearly flu vaccination for ALL children aged 6 months through 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.

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

Yes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 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.

13) The "Consent for Child's Vaccination" section of the consent form says that the Flu Nasal Spray should not be given within 4 weeks of a measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) or varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, and to inform my child's doctor that my child will be receiving a Flu Nasal Spray vaccine at school between October – December 2009. Why?

The Nasal Spray Flu vaccine should not be given within 4 weeks of a MMR or varicella vaccination to ensure that your child's immune system develops appropriate immunity against the germ/disease contained in those vaccinations. If these live weakened virus vaccines are given too close together in time, your child may not develop immunity in

response to the second vaccination. Flu shots (injectable vaccine, which contains inactivated virus), however, may still be given.

If you have questions or concerns about this recommendation, please contact your child's pediatrician or health care provider.

14) Who will give the flu vaccine to my child(ren)?

Trained DOH appointed personnel will administer the flu vaccine.

15) Is my child required to be vaccinated against flu?

No. Participation in the school-based program is voluntary, and your permission is required. However, remember that it is now recommended that all children age 6 months through 18 years should be vaccinated yearly against flu.

16) My child doesn't like needles or shots. Is there another way to get vaccinated?

Yes. Besides the traditional "flu shot," the nasal spray flu vaccine will be offered.

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

Yes. Many other agencies are helping DOH in organizing, applying, 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. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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.

18) Could my child still get the flu after being vaccinated?

You can't get the flu from the flu shot. However, it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide full protection against flu virus infection. In the meantime, your child is still at risk for getting the flu. Also, the flu vaccine will not protect against other flu virus strains that are not contained in this year's flu vaccine or other viruses that cause symptoms similar to the flu.

19) Are flu vaccines safe?

Yes. A recent study of the flu shot involving more than 45,000 babies and children found the vaccine is safe. This adds to past evidence of flu vaccine safety.

20) Can the flu vaccine produce any side effects?

Yes, but they are usually very minor.

The most common side effects after the traditional "flu shot" include soreness, redness, and swelling at the shot site. Sometimes, one might have 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 after the nasal spray flu vaccine are also uncommon but may include: runny or stuffy nose, cough, headache, muscle aches, fever, stomach ache, or sometimes, 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>

21) Does the flu vaccine work?

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

22) 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 in the nasal spray flu vaccine can sometimes cause mild stuffy and runny nose (like the common cold), but because this vaccine cannot grow in the lungs, it cannot cause severe flu problems such as pneumonia.

23) 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 amounts of egg proteins. Therefore, people who are allergic to eggs should not receive the flu vaccine.

24) Does the flu vaccine contain thimerosal?

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

25) 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>).

26) Why does my child need to get vaccinated against the flu every year to be protected?

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.

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

27) My child is under 8 years old. The “Dear Parents” letter says children age 8 years and younger who are receiving the flu vaccine for the first time need a second dose. Since there will be only one clinic per school, where can my child receive his/her second dose of flu vaccine?

Please schedule an appointment with your child’s doctor if he/she needs a second dose of flu vaccine. If your child does not have a regular doctor, please contact the Public Health Nursing Clinic in your area or a Community Health Center.

28) What is the Hawai’i Immunization Registry?

The Hawai’i Immunization Registry is a secure computer system that stores and tracks patient immunization records and makes them available to doctors, nurses, and other authorized healthcare workers only. For more information, visit the Hawai’i Immunization Registry website at <http://Hawaii.gov/health/family-child-health/immunization/registry/index.html> or call (808) 586-4665 (Oahu) or 1-888-447-1023 (Neighbor Islands).