

What you should know about Influenza and Influenza Vaccine

Influenza vaccination is the most effective way of preventing the flu. Beginning in October, flu vaccine funded by Washington state and the federal Vaccines For Children (VFC) program will be available through Public Health and private providers to cover all children ages 6 months through 18 years, regardless of ability to pay.

Large numbers of healthy children, adolescents and younger adults develop influenza infection each year, leading to doctor visits and missed days of school, work and other activities. In addition, healthy older children and adults can spread influenza within families to persons at high risk for serious illness. Influenza-related severe complications and hospitalizations are most common in adults 65 years of age, children less than 2 years of age, and children and adults with a *high risk medical condition for severe influenza (like asthma, diabetes, and chronic heart, lung, and kidney disease)*.

Who should receive influenza vaccine?

- Influenza vaccine is now recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) for all children ages 6 months through 18 years.
- Influenza vaccine is also recommended for
 - adults age 50 years and older,
 - persons of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as heart, lung, or kidney disease, or diabetes) that increase the risk of complications from influenza
 - pregnant women
 - household contacts of pregnant women, persons with high-risk conditions, or infants under age 6 months

In addition to being immunized, it is also important to wash your hands, cover your cough, and stay home (from work, school, or other activities) when you're sick. School age children can pick up influenza infection from each other at school and then easily spread it to young siblings and other family members in their household who are elderly or otherwise at high risk for influenza complications.

Either injectable flu vaccine (TIV) or intranasal flu vaccine (FluMist or LAIV) can be used when vaccinating healthy persons aged 2--49 years. LAIV should not be administered to children aged <5 years with possible reactive airway disease, such as those who have had recurrent wheezing or a recent wheezing episode. TIV should be used instead for children with possible reactive airway disease, persons at higher risk for influenza complications because of underlying medical conditions, children aged 6--23 months, and persons aged >49 years.

Children aged 6 months--8 years should receive 2 doses of vaccine if they have not been vaccinated previously at any time with either LAIV or TIV (doses separated by ≥ 4 weeks); 2 doses are required for protection in these children. Children aged 6 months--8 years who received only 1 dose in their first year of vaccination should receive 2 doses the following year.

The 2008--09 trivalent vaccine virus strains are A/Brisbane/59/2007 (H1N1)-like, A/Brisbane/10/2007 (H3N2)-like, and B/Florida/4/2006-like antigens, the strains expected to be circulating during this flu season.

Where can we get flu vaccine?

Many private providers will have flu vaccine for children and adults. Additional flu vaccine locations are listed on Public Health's website at www.kingcounty.gov/health/flu.

If your school is interested in sponsoring a flu vaccine clinic for staff, students, or the community, Public Health can refer you to immunization providers.

Where can we find additional information about influenza?

Educators and staff can help slow the spread of colds and flu. A fact sheet on "Stopping Germs at Home, Work and School" can be downloaded from CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials/home_work_school.pdf.

Influenza information will be updated on our web site throughout the flu season, at www.kingcounty.gov/health/flu and you may call our immunization program at 206-296-4774 with questions regarding influenza vaccine recommendations or influenza surveillance.