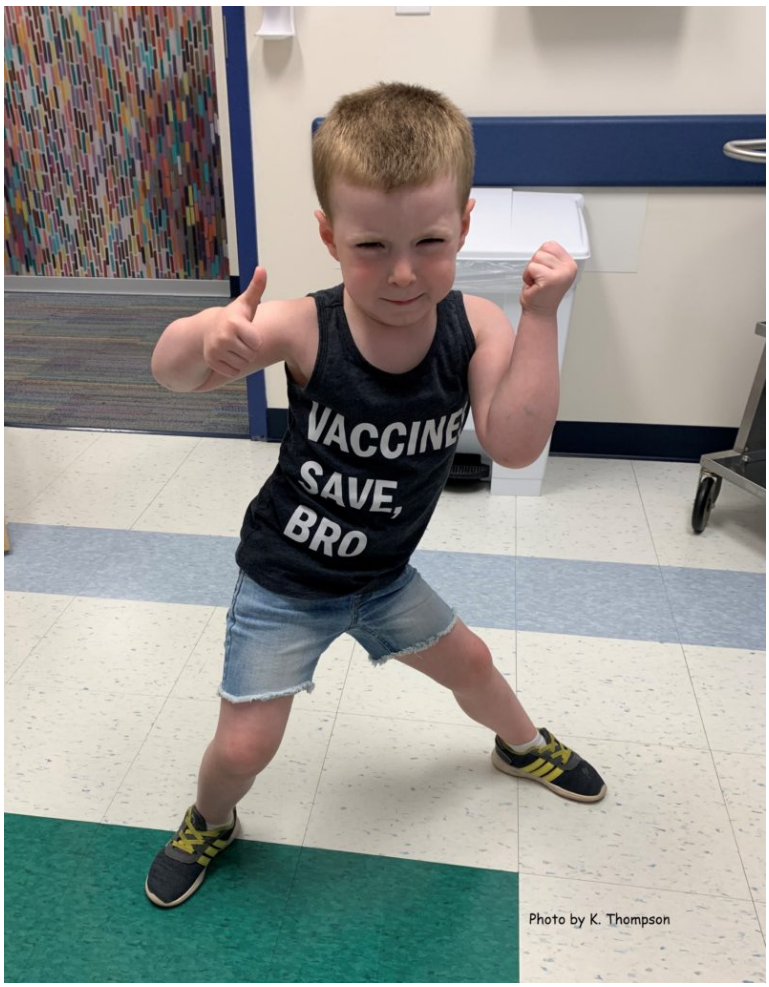
Flu vaccine 2019-2020



Excited for his Germ Fighters, this kiddo wears his “Vaccines save, bro” shirt for all of his pediatric office vaccine visits.

The US flu vaccine 2019-2020 is here!

Who should get it?

Unless medically contraindicated, all kids aged six months and older should get the flu vaccine. Your child’s pediatrician will ask you questions to be sure the flu vaccine is appropriate for your child.

Is the flu vaccine different this year from last year?

Yes, so even if your child received a flu vaccine last year, they should get another one this year. The predicted flu strains change yearly so manufacturers make up a new batch of flu vaccines every year.

Which flu vaccine should they get- the shot or the-spray-in-the-nose kind?

All kids can get the shot. Kids two years and older without certain other medical conditions can get the nose spray. If your child is eligible for both, then the best type to get is the one that is available- they are both effective.

When should they get the flu vaccine?

The goal is to be completely immunized for this year's flu season by Halloween- the end of October. When it comes to the flu vaccine, "better late than never" also holds true. It is impossible to predict precisely when the flu will hit and how long it will circulate. So even if it's mid winter, get the vaccine if it is still available.

How many doses do they need?

If your child is under the age of nine years and never had a flu vaccine or had only one prior dose of flu vaccine before the date of June 30, 2019, then they need two doses separated by a minimum of four weeks. All other kids need one dose only every year.

What are the common side effects of the flu vaccine?

The injectable brands of flu vaccine, like all shots, can cause mild symptoms such as soreness or redness in the body area where a child gets the shot, fever, or fatigue. The nasal spray version can cause some nasal congestion, sore throat, fever, and muscle aches.

Can any flu vaccine cause the flu?

No.

You can read a summary about the nasal spray form of the flu vaccine here and well as the injectable form of the flu vaccine here. Both of these Vaccine Information Statements expand on all of the above points.

Still on the fence about flu vaccine 2019-2020?

Last year, 116 children in the US died from the flu, and almost half of these children were previously healthy kids. The average age of death was six years. Of those who died and COULD have received flu vaccine- meaning the ones that were older than 6 months of age, 70% did NOT receive the flu vaccine. So flu vaccine might have averted more than half of these flu deaths.

Additionally, of children last year in the hospital with flu, the majority did NOT receive flu vaccine. The flu killed thousands of adults last year. School-aged children are the group most likely to spread the flu germs. Therefore, flu vaccine not only can protect your children and those too young or too ill to be vaccinated, but also protects your children's grandparents.

Click here for an exhaustive review of the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations for this year's flu season. We hoped to provide you all with the most important highlights. You can read our flu vaccine myth-busters here.

Julie Kardos, MD and Naline Lai, MD
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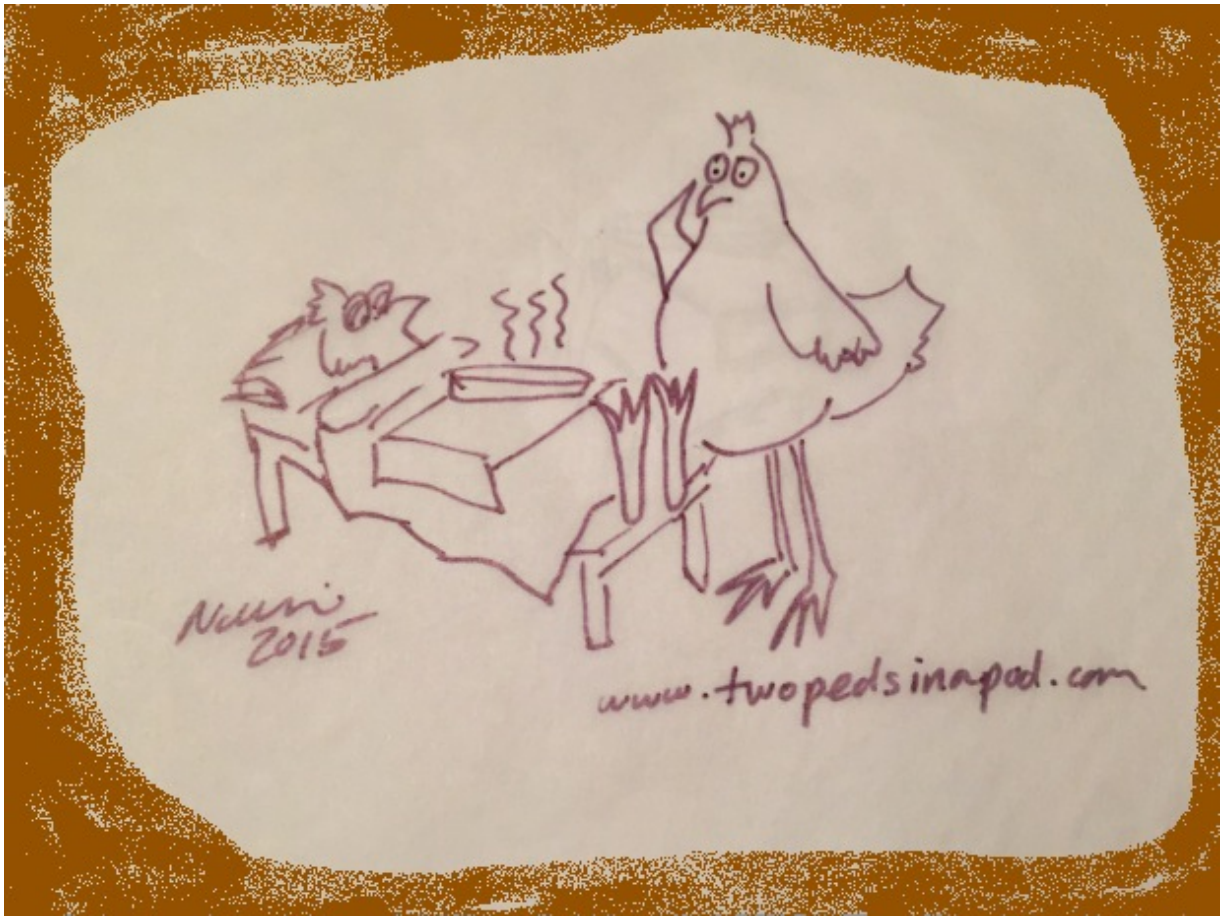
Does my child have a cold or the flu?



"Now what kind of soup did the doctor recommend? Was that tomato soup? Mushroom Barley?"

Headlines remind us daily that the US is officially in the midst of flu season. We are also in the midst of a really yucky cold season. We have seen numerous kids in our offices with bad colds and others with flu.

Parents ask us every day how they can tell if their child has a cold or the flu. While no method is fool proof, here

are some typical differences:

The flu, caused by influenza virus, comes on suddenly and makes you feel as if you've been hit by a truck.

Flu almost always causes fever of 101°F or higher and some respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, cough, or sore throat (many times, all three). Children, more often than adults, sometimes will vomit and have diarrhea along with their respiratory symptoms, but contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing as "stomach flu." In addition to the usual respiratory symptoms, the flu causes body aches, headaches, and often the sensation of your eyes burning. The fever usually lasts 5-7 days. All symptoms come on at once; there is nothing gradual about coming down with the flu.

Colds, even really yucky ones, start out gradually.

Think back to your last cold: first your throat felt scratchy or sore, then the next day your nose got stuffy or then started running profusely, then you developed a cough. **Sometimes during a cold you get a fever for a few days.** Sometimes you get hoarse and lose your voice. The same gradual progression of symptoms occurs in kids. In addition, kids often feel tired because of interrupted sleep from cough or nasal congestion. This tiredness leads to extra crankiness.

Usually kids still feel well enough to play and attend school with colds.

The average length of a cold is 7-10 days although sometimes it takes two weeks or more for all coughing and nasal congestion to resolve.

Important news flash about mucus:

The mucus from a cold can be thick, thin, clear, yellow,

green, or white, and can change from one to the other, all in the same cold. The color of mucus does NOT tell you if your child needs an antibiotic and will not help you differentiate between a cold and the flu. Here's a post on sinus infections vs. a cold.

Remember: colds = gradual and annoying. Flu = sudden and miserable.

If your child has a runny nose and cough, but is drinking well, playing well, sleeping well and does not have a fever and the symptoms have been around for a few days, the illness is unlikely to "turn into the flu."

Fortunately, a vaccine against the flu is available for all kids over 6 months old

This flu vaccine can prevent the misery of the flu. In addition, vaccines against influenza save lives by preventing flu-related complications such as pneumonia, encephalitis (brain infection), and severe dehydration. Even though we are starting to see a lot of flu, it is not too late to get the flu vaccine for your child. Please schedule a flu vaccine ASAP if your child has not yet received one for this season. Parents and caregivers should also immunize themselves. We all know how well a household functions when Mom or Dad have the flu… not very well! Sadly there have been 20 children so far this flu season who died from the flu. In past years many flu deaths were in kids who did not receive the flu vaccine, so please vaccinate your children against the flu if you have not already. Unfortunately, the vaccine isn't effective in babies younger than 6 months, so it is important to vaccinate everyone who lives or cares for a baby this young.

Be sure to read our article on ways to prevent colds and flu. As pediatricians, we remind you to WASH HANDS, make sure your child eats healthy, gets enough sleep, and avoid crowds, when possible. As moms, we add that you might want to cook up a pot

of good old-fashioned chicken soup to have on hand in case illness strikes your family.

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