

Communicating the Benefits of Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

During the 2017–2018 influenza season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shared early estimates that influenza (flu) accounted for more than 79,400 deaths. Of these, 185 were pediatric deaths, and 80% of these children had not received a flu vaccinationⁱ. To help patients understand the importance of protecting themselves and their loved ones, public health officials and providers should communicate the benefits of flu vaccination in helping to reduce disease outcomes, including hospitalization and death.

What are the Benefits of Seasonal Flu Vaccine?

Research has shown that flu vaccination:

▶ Reduces Hospitalization and Death

- ✓ Reduction of pediatric deaths from flu by 51% for children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and 65% for healthy childrenⁱⁱ
- ✓ Reduction of hospitalizations for vaccinated adults and seniors by 22% for all adults and 24% for those 65+ years of ageⁱⁱⁱ
- ✓ Reduction of hospitalizations among people with chronic health conditions, including diabetes (79%)^{iv} and chronic lung disease (52%)^v

During the 2017–18 flu season, **8 of 10 children who died from influenza were unvaccinated**, and half were otherwise healthyⁱ.

▶ Reduces Severity of Illness in Hospitalized Individuals

- ✓ Reduction of intensive care unit (ICU) admission by 59% in hospitalized adults associated with vaccination against flu compared to the non-vaccinated^{vi}
- ✓ Reduction of children's risk of flu-related pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) admission by 74%^{vii}

▶ Reduces Risks for Major Cardiac Events

- ✓ Reduction of heart attack risk (29%) and major cardiac events (36%) demonstrated in people with existing cardiovascular disease^{viii}
- ✓ Flu vaccine is as effective as a statin in preventing heart attacks (statin 19–30% effective vs. flu vaccine 15–45% effective)^{ix}

▶ Reduces Loss of Independence in Adults

- ✓ 15% of older adults hospitalized with influenza were shown to experience catastrophic disability^x (defined as a loss of independence in ≥3 basic Activities of Daily Living)^{xi}

▶ Protects Pregnant Women and Their Babies

- ✓ Reduction of risk of flu-associated acute respiratory infection in pregnant women by 50%^{xii}

FOOTNOTES

- CDC. Summary of the 2017–2018 Influenza Season.
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Tips

How to Discuss Vaccine Effectiveness

- **Keep it simple:** “Flu vaccine helps reduce risk of hospitalization and death.”
- **Use a presumptive approach:** “Today we are giving you your annual flu vaccination.”
- **Communicate why we vaccinate:** “Vaccination prevents the severe outcomes of flu.”
- **Communicate the variability and unpredictability of flu:** “This is why it is best to get an annual flu vaccination.”
- **Acknowledge that flu vaccination is not always a perfect match with the circulating virus types, but it is the best way to protect against flu infection and its outcomes; any flu vaccination is better than none.**

Vaccination rates^{xiii} remained well below optimal levels during the 2017–2018 influenza season:

- 47%*** for all people 6+ months
- 58%** for children ages 6 months through 17 years (one dose)
- 37%** for adults 18+ years
- 60%** for adults 65+ years
- 68%*** for healthcare personnel
- 36%*** for pregnant women

*Early-season data available only (as of November 2017)

