

FluMist vs. Flu Shot: What Parents Should Know

After two years off the market, the nasal FluMist is once again available as a vaccination against the influenza virus. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) both say there is no difference in protection between the mist and the injectable form of the vaccine.

However because FluMist has had a spotty track record in recent years, the AAP is not recommending it as a first choice for pediatric patients.

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Dr. Samina Yousuf, OSF HealthCare Pediatrician

(:19) "Because in previous season, for example the 2013-14 and 15-16 seasons, the FluMist actually did not provide adequate coverage and that's why it wasn't used last year. It is unknown how it's actually going to work this year."

Dr. Yousuf says there are exceptions. FluMist should be used if a child will only be vaccinated if he or she can avoid a needle, or if a doctor runs out of flu shots. Unlike the injectable vaccine, FluMist includes a weakened live virus.

SOT

Dr. Samina Yousuf, OSF HealthCare Pediatrician

(:16) "If you have a child who absolutely refuses to get the vaccination but agrees to the nasal, then we would then offer the nasal to them. In that case they would have to be healthy, they would have to have no other chronic medical conditions."

The CDC does not share the same concerns as the AAP, and fully recommends either form of the vaccination.

However, no matter how a child receives the vaccine, Dr. Yousuf says getting one is paramount. She shared some sobering statistics from last year's flu season to underscore her recommendation.

SOT

Dr. Samina Yousuf, OSF HealthCare Pediatrician

(:18) "Last year was one of the most devastating years for pediatrics in terms of influenza. There were 179 patients that died. Children that were healthy otherwise that died from influenza. 80% of those children had not been vaccinated. And there were thousands of others who were hospitalized."

Dr. Yousuf says outside of the flu vaccine, her number one recommendation to prevent the spread of the flu virus is washing your hands. She says if your hands are visibly dirty, use soap and water. Otherwise you can use hand sanitizer.

She also suggests avoiding crowded areas during peak flu season when possible. Last year, peak flu season was from December through March.