

## 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.

“Because in previous season, for example the 2013-14 and 15-16 seasons, the flu mist 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,” said Dr. Samina Yousuf, an OSF HealthCare Pediatrician.

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.

“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,” she said. “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.

“Last year was one of the most devastating years for pediatrics in terms of influenza,” said Dr. Yousuf. “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.

## Common misconceptions about the flu vaccine

**Myth:** The vaccine can give you the flu.

**Fact:** OSF HealthCare offers vaccines that aren’t live and cannot infect you.

**Myth:** You don’t need to get vaccinated every year.

**Fact:** Immunity to the influenza virus declines over time, so you should get the flu shot every year for maximum protection. Plus, the vaccine is updated every year to protect against the flu strains expected to be most common.

**Myth:** Getting vaccinated guarantees you can't get the flu.

**Fact:** It takes up to two weeks after getting vaccinated to build up immunity to the flu. You can still get sick during this period. Plus, even after getting vaccinated, you could still catch the flu from a strain of the virus not included in the vaccine. Take steps to prevent the spread of germs during the flu season.

**Myth:** The flu is not dangerous.

**Fact:** The flu causes the deaths of thousands of people every year. The very young, the very old, or people with health issues are especially at risk of dangerous complications from the flu.

**Myth:** People with an egg allergy cannot get vaccinated.

**Fact:** People with egg allergies can receive the influenza vaccine. OSF HealthCare offers vaccines for people with severe egg allergies. However, if you have severe egg allergies, you should be vaccinated where you can be supervised by a health care provider.

**Myth:** People with a latex allergy cannot get vaccinated.

**Fact:** OSF HealthCare offers vaccines that don't contain any latex.

**Myth:** The flu shot contains mercury.

**Fact:** Flu vaccines used to contain a preservative called thimerosal, which contained ethylmercury. In small doses, ethylmercury is not harmful to humans.