

Flu vaccination rates remain alarmingly low

Since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people becoming sick with influenza ([flu](#)) has drastically increased each respiratory illness season.

A major part of that, according to [Mustafa Bakir, MD, pediatric infectious disease specialist with OSF HealthCare](#), is due to extremely low vaccination rates.

In Illinois, only 24.4% of eligible people have received their flu vaccines this season. For kids ages 0-4, only 25.1% have gotten vaccinated. For children 5-17, it drops to 18.1%.

[Illinois Department of Public Health's](#) goal? 70%.

Some Americans tend to think the flu is just a seasonal inconvenience, but Dr. Bakir has seen the consequences of limited vaccination rates firsthand.

In his home country of Türkiye, Dr. Bakir has treated children who were dying from viral illnesses due to no access to vaccines.

"As a resident, I have seen kids die from hepatitis and hepatitis B related cirrhosis (irreversible scarring of the liver) and cancer," Dr. Bakir says. "Ten years after vaccination was implemented, we have seen none if they are vaccinated."

"I saw kids dying in front of my eyes from tetanus if they are not vaccinated," he adds. "I have seen a lot of cases of polio. Small kids paralyzed for life. It's easily preventable with vaccination."

Severe flu complications are much more possible in those who are unvaccinated. Dr. Bakir says one third of flu patients admitted to the hospital will develop pneumonia.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) [reports](#) that 32 influenza-related pediatric deaths have occurred in the 2025-2026 season. Among kids who were eligible for influenza vaccination, 90% of the deaths were in kids who were not fully vaccinated against the virus.

"Severe Influenza complications have been seen in the most vulnerable patients. Like older adults, kids 5 years and younger and those who have chronic diseases," Dr. Bakir says. "They should be protected. The greatest protection is provided by immunization."

To learn more about what vaccines you or your child are eligible for, or to schedule your vaccination, visit osfhealthcare.org.