



Influenza Vaccination Requirements for Children in Daycare or Preschool: Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

Why does the Board of Health require my daycare and preschool-aged child to be vaccinated against influenza?

Each year, many children get sick with seasonal influenza, and some die. The highest infection rates are in children under 5 years old; in fact, *10 to 40%* of children under 5 years old will get influenza each year.

Conditions at daycares and preschools allow influenza to spread. At these locations, many children are in close contact, and children may not cover their coughs. Many daycare-aged children haven't been vaccinated against influenza. Vaccination is the best way to protect your children from infection.

Young children can also spread influenza throughout the entire community, passing it to other children and their family members, who then spread infection to others. Immunizing your children against influenza protects the rest of the population, including vulnerable populations, like the elderly and pregnant women.

Does the New York City Health Department have the authority to require this immunization?

Yes, the City Charter gives the Health Department authority over all matters concerning health in New York City.

When will the vaccination requirement begin, and how will it be enforced?

The requirement went into effect in January 2014 and requires parents and child care facility operators to take these steps:

- **Parents Must Vaccinate Children:** Children between 6 months and 5 years old who attend City-regulated daycares and preschools must be vaccinated annually. That means each child must receive at least one dose of the influenza vaccine between July 1 and December 31 each year.
- **Child Care Facilities Must Document Vaccinations:** Child care facilities must track whether all students have received the influenza vaccination.

Since the requirement is new, the Health Department will provide these resources to your community:

- Informative print and online materials sent to childcare facilities
- Promotional materials for childcare facilities that must follow the regulation
- Education for childcare facility staff provided by the Health Department's Bureau of Child Care

In 2015, the Health Department's Bureau of Child Care will enforce the requirement by educating childcare staff during routine inspections.

Beginning January 1, 2016, the Department will begin issuing notices of violation to childcare facilities that fail to follow the mandate.

How is the influenza vaccine given?

There are two types of vaccine:

1. The “**flu shot**” contains inactivated virus particles and is administered by injection.
2. The “**Flumist**,” also called “**nasal spray**” or “**LAIV**,” contains a weakened virus and is a nasal spray.

Most children can use either vaccine but may prefer one over the other. Talk to your pediatrician about the best vaccination method for your child.

When should my child get the influenza vaccine?

The new mandate requires that your child be vaccinated between July 1 and December 31 each year. (See above.) Your child should get the vaccine as soon as it’s available within that timeframe so that he or she will be protected when influenza season starts.

How long is the influenza vaccination good for?

The influenza vaccine protects your child for one influenza season. Influenza activity is usually at its worst January through March, but it can start as early as November and extend as late as May. It's important that your child receive an influenza vaccine each year because influenza virus strains change annually. That's why the vaccine is updated each year.

Does the influenza vaccine work?

The influenza vaccine is the best protection against seasonal influenza. Children who receive the influenza vaccine are 60% less likely to get sick and need medical attention for influenza. The vaccine also reduces the chance of death from influenza. It can help with other benefits, such as reducing illness, antibiotic use, hospitalizations and time lost from school and work.

Is the influenza vaccine safe?

Influenza vaccines have been given for more than 50 years, and they have a very good safety track record. Influenza vaccines are made the same way each year, and their safety is closely monitored by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration.

Hundreds of millions of influenza vaccines have been given safely.

Are there any side effects to the seasonal influenza vaccine?

Common side effects include soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site, low fever and feeling achy and tired. Serious side effects are very rare. Ask your doctor if you have any concerns about side effects.

Can the influenza vaccine cause the flu?

No. Injected influenza vaccines do not contain a live virus and cannot cause influenza. The nasal vaccine contains weakened viruses that may cause a stuffy nose but will not cause influenza illness.

What are preservatives, and why are they sometimes used in vaccines?

Preservatives have been used in vaccines for over 70 years. Preservatives are added to vaccines that are packaged in multi-dose vials and will be used more than once after opening. Preservatives prevent the growth of bacteria or fungi that could make the vaccine unsafe after opening. Single-dose influenza vaccines, which are used only once after opening, do not contain preservatives.

Does the influenza vaccine contain mercury?

Some vaccines contain trace amounts of a chemical compound called thimerosal, which contains mercury. Thimerosal prevents contamination of the vaccine. Multi-dose vials of influenza vaccine contain a small amount of thimerosal. Single-dose influenza vaccines do not contain thimerosal. If you are concerned about mercury, ask your provider for a single-dose vaccine that does not contain any mercury.

Do seasonal influenza vaccines contain latex?

The Fluzone® and Fluvirin® vaccines do not contain latex and can be given to people with a life-threatening latex allergy. Ask your doctor if you're concerned about an allergy.

Can my child be excluded from daycare if he or she doesn't get an influenza vaccine?

Yes. Children who have not provided proof that they received the influenza vaccine by December 31st of each year may be excluded from daycare and preschool.

Can my child be exempted from receiving the influenza vaccine?

As with all immunizations requirements in New York City, children with a valid medical or religious objection will not be required to be vaccinated. If you wish to be exempted from the influenza vaccine requirement, please submit proper documentation to your child's daycare or preschool facility.

How will I afford my child's vaccine?

All children in New York State have access to free or low-cost vaccines under the law. Also, the federal Affordable Care Act requires insurance to provide coverage for all major recommended vaccines, and co-pays for immunizations are not allowed. Currently, 75% of New York City children receive publically funded vaccines, and the rest have private insurance. Free vaccines are also directly given to New York City providers for children without insurance or whose insurance doesn't cover immunizations.

Where can my child get an influenza vaccine?

You can contact your child's medical provider to receive the vaccine. Alternatively, to find a clinic, visit www.nyc.gov and search "flu," or call 311.