

All About Influenza Vaccine

What is Influenza?

Influenza (flu) or common cold is a viral infection which primarily affects the respiratory system (nose, throat, and lungs). It is spread by tiny droplets from the nose, throat or mouth of an infected person. Symptoms develop 48 hours after coming into contact with the virus. Common symptoms are fever, chills, generalized aches and pains, headache and respiratory symptoms (sore throat, runny nose, cough).

How does vaccination help?

It is an inactivated vaccine (this means that vaccine is made from a dead virus). After vaccination, protective antibodies are formed, against four different types of influenza virus, which are prevalent in that particular year as per WHO recommendation. However, vaccination does not treat an existing flu virus infection.

What brands have been approved for flu vaccination in India, by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)?

Two brands, Influvac Tetra (Abbott) and Fluarix Tetra (Glaxo Smithkline) have received DCGI approval.

What is the right age for flu vaccination?

The minimum age for inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV) is 6 months as per Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP).

What are the current recommendations for Flu vaccination in children?

Flu vaccine is recommended for all children between the ages of 6 months to 5 years. From 6 to 18 years it is recommended in children with co – morbidities like cardiac, respiratory, hematological, renal illnesses (like nephrotic syndrome), chronic liver disease, diabetes mellitus, congenital & acquired immunodeficiency (including HIV), children on long term salicylates, laboratory personnel & health care personnel.

How many doses of Flu vaccine are given initially?

When IIV is administered for the first time, between the ages of 6 months to below 9 years, two doses 4 weeks apart are recommended. For children above the age of 9 years single dose is given.

Are any booster doses required?

After the initial vaccination of one or two doses as per age, annual revaccination with single dose is given.

Why is yearly vaccine needed?

Vaccination is required each year because different new strains of the flu virus keep emerging regularly due to which each year, a new vaccination is needed against those particular strains.

What is the dose of the vaccine?

Inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV) is given above 6 months as 0.5 ml (15mcg/0.5ml) injection administered intramuscularly.

What if my child has received only one dose of the vaccine previously?

If your child is less than 9 years of age, and has received less than two doses in the past, he / she should receive two doses again in this season.

What is the best time to vaccinate?

It is best to get your flu shot before the onset of peak influenza activity. In our country, influenza infections occur throughout the year with a clear peaking during the rainy season all over the country, which is between June to August in all the regions except Tamil Nadu where it occurs between October to December. In addition, the extreme northern part of India has a peak in cooler winter months. Hence, the best time to vaccinate is the pre-monsoon period, May-June, with the latest available strain, which is the Southern Hemisphere (SH) strain because as per WHO, India is classified under the 'South Asia' transmission zone of Influenza circulation.

Are there any side effects associated?

Side effects are quite infrequent and may include headache, weakness, tiredness, and pain or swelling at the vaccination site. They usually last for a short duration.

When should you avoid the vaccination?

We usually avoid any vaccination in children with any illness like high temperature, colds and coughs or previous allergic reaction to the vaccine. Do tell your doctor about any allergies that your child may have.

Should we vaccinate against Influenza in COVID times?

Absolutely yes. Flu is a seasonal illness and peaks during monsoon season. By getting vaccinated against flu virus, we are protecting our children against a respiratory illness symptoms of which resemble those due to covid infection. Hence, the number of hospital visits, and investigations are avoided.

Highlights for Flu Vaccine:

Why? Protects against influenza infection

Is it required? Recommended in COVID times as it protects against respiratory illnesses

Minimum age: Above 6 months of age

Dose: 0.5 ml (15mcg/0.5ml) IM (intra muscularly)

Number of Doses: > 6 months to < 9 years, two doses 4 weeks apart.

- 9 years single dose is given.
- Thereafter one dose yearly

Not Recommended: In case of illness like fever, cough, cold or other illness

Side Effects: Mild (headache, weakness, tiredness, and pain or swelling at injection site)