

Strong Push for Pediatric Flu Shots During COVID

by Libby Allison

September 27 2020 8:00 AM



Each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly recommend parents get their children vaccinated against influenza.

This year both organizations agree the flu shot is more important than ever, because there is a real possibility of kids getting both the flu and COVID-19.

“It is definitely possible that you could get both of these viruses and you could be co-infected, and you could be much sicker than you would if you just had one of them,” warned Dr. Samina Yousuf, an OSF HealthCare pediatrician in Bloomington, IL.

COVID-19 and the flu are both contagious respiratory illnesses. While they are caused by different viruses, they do share many of the same symptoms, including fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, sore throat, body aches and runny nose. Children may also develop gastrointestinal issues like vomiting and diarrhea.

Because of these similarities, Dr. Yousuf says if a child does get sick, knowing he or she has been immunized for the flu could help determine a treatment plan, while lessening the burden on the health care system.

“If we can immunize as many children as we can, we can hopefully lower the incidence of flu that we see in children,” she said. “And by doing that we can cut out the resources that would be used if a sick child presents to us and we do not know if this is COVID or if this is flu.”

Even without the threat of COVID, the flu is dangerous for children. A CDC study published in the journal Pediatrics shows the majority of children who died from the flu in recent years were not vaccinated.

“Talking about the flu we must remember that this is actually an illness that can cause death in children. Last year there were 188 children who died because of influenza,” said Dr. Yousuf. She continued, “57% of those were absolutely healthy children. The median age of the children that died was six years old, and it ranges anywhere from two months to 17 years.”

It's recommended that everyone six months and older get an annual flu vaccine. According to the CDC, the flu season can begin as early as October and continue through April or May, and the prime time for kids to receive the flu shot is in September or October so they can have full protection by the height of the season.

Dr. Yousuf urges parents to get their children vaccinated for the flu as soon as possible, and to speak with their child's physician if they have any questions or concerns.