

The Children's Doctor



My doctor has suggested a flu vaccine for my 3 year old daughter this year. Is this necessary? I have heard that you can get really sick with the flu afterwards. Is this true?

Flu vaccine is not on the standard immunisation schedule at this stage. It is available on script and generally costs around \$15. The benefit of the flu vaccine is to prevent infections with the most common strains of influenza viruses. This can help to minimise the amount of time your daughter may require off daycare and minimise the amount of time you need off work. It is not compulsory but is highly recommended for children with underlying medical problems such as heart problems, lung problems or chronic illnesses.

The first time your child has a flu vaccine, she will need 2 doses, separated by about 1 month. Because the flu viruses change slightly with each winter season, she will need a single booster dose every year. Influenza is a virus but the strains change slightly each year so the vaccine is adjusted and released at the beginning of each winter. It is not a live vaccine so you cannot catch the flu from the vaccine. However, it should be said, that you can catch the flu from the doctor's waiting room whilst waiting to get your immunisation!! Common reactions to the flu vaccine include a lump at the site of the injection and fevers in the 24 hours following immunisation.

The flu vaccine is safe for use in any child aged over 6 months. Children who attend daycare, are very likely to be exposed to and then catch the flu virus. This is because they come into contact with a large number of people every day. Also, children have no respect for germs, so wipe their nose on their hand and then put that hand on a toy or on another child. They will also cough directly on other children without turning away or covering their mouth. Other than strict hygiene measures, there is no other way to prevent your child from getting the flu. The flu vaccine is best given at the start of the winter season (early March) although it can be given at any time.