

# The Issue of Safety of the Influenza Vaccine

## For Parents



The influenza vaccine is both effective and safe.

A severe or life-threatening allergic reaction to the vaccine—within a few minutes to a few hours after administration—is extremely rare.

In reality, any reactions to the vaccine usually are mild and last no more than a day or two.

The most common side effects are:

- **For the injectable vaccine:** Pain, redness, swelling, or itching at the injection site, similar to other vaccines used in children
- **For the intranasal vaccine:** Runny or stuffy nose. These symptoms will soon disappear and do not indicate that the child has the flu.<sup>1</sup>

The vaccines do not transmit the flu.<sup>1</sup>

Other safety concerns are:

- **Underlying chronic conditions.** Children with pulmonary diseases, diabetes, asthma, renal dysfunction, or other chronic conditions *can* and *should be* vaccinated against influenza, because they have an enhanced risk of developing complications if they become infected by influenza. These children receive the injectable form of the vaccine.<sup>1</sup>
- **Egg allergy.** It recently has been found that almost all children with egg allergy can safely receive intramuscular influenza vaccine. Only children who have a **severe** reaction to egg—cardiovascular changes or respiratory or gastrointestinal tract symptoms—need to be seen by an allergist before being vaccinated.<sup>1</sup> Even children who develop hives when they eat eggs can be vaccinated—something that was not recommended in the past.
- **Thimerosal.** This preservative has been largely removed from all vaccines (since 2001!) because of accusations—unsubstantiated—that it is associated with development of autism. Some injectable formulations of influenza vaccine contain trace amounts of thimerosal, others do not; the intranasal preparation has no thimerosal.<sup>1</sup>
- **Live virus in the intranasal spray.** The live virus in this vaccine formulation has been weakened, and the risk that the vaccine can transmit the virus is extremely low.<sup>1</sup>
- **Guillain-Barré syndrome.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that children who have had Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 weeks after a previous influenza vaccination should not be vaccinated. Whether influenza vaccination actually might increase the risk of recurrence of this syndrome is not known.<sup>1</sup>

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### Reference

1. Committee on Infectious Diseases. American Academy of Pediatrics. Recommendations for prevention and control of influenza in children, 2011-2012. *Pediatrics*. 2011;128:813-825.