



ASHLEY FALCO, M.D.

PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY FROM THE FLU

A HENRY FORD HEALTH SYSTEM PEDIATRICIAN WEIGHS IN ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RECEIVING AN ANNUAL FLU SHOT.

During the 1918 influenza pandemic, approximately one third of the world's population became infected, and 675,000 people in the United States died. A century later, the flu remains a deadly disease. That's why doctors recommend yearly flu shots as the first line of prevention.

"The flu vaccine should be given to everyone over the age of 6 months unless there is a medical contraindication. This is the best option for reducing your child's risk of severe illness or complications from the flu," says board-certified pediatrician, Ashley Falco, M.D., with Henry Ford Medical Center – Pierson in Grosse Pointe Farms. "If possible, children should receive their flu vaccines by the end of October."

Two flu shots are recommended for children between the ages of 6 months and 8 years old who have not been vaccinated previously.

"Everyone in a household should receive the vaccine, including pregnant women, grandparents and child care providers to help reduce the spread of the illness," Falco says.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it takes about two weeks after vaccination for protective antibodies to develop. "The flu

vaccine is inactive and cannot give your child the flu," Falco adds.

In past years, the flu vaccine being given was not a good match for the actual flu strain circulating at the time. However, Falco says you and your children should still be vaccinated.

"Like all vaccines, the flu shot is not 100 percent effective in preventing disease. But, it will help to reduce severity of the disease," she says. "This is especially important in high-risk groups including those with asthma, heart disease or a weakened immune system. In addition to protecting your own child by giving them the flu vaccine you are also helping to protect those who are unable to receive the vaccine."

There are everyday actions to fight the spread of flu. "Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough, then dispose of your tissue properly and wash your hands," Falco says.

Proper hand washing is a simple step that can reduce illness dramatically. "Wet, Lather, Scrub, Rinse, Dry," Falco says. "Scrub for at least 20 seconds." Singing a song like the "Happy Birthday" song teaches children the correct amount of time to scrub. If soap and water is not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be used.