

Pandemic influenza vaccination for children with chronic medical conditions



WHY IS VACCINATION SO IMPORTANT?

In NSW during 2009 children under 5 years old were the most likely to spend time in hospital with pandemic influenza. Nearly half of the children admitted to children's hospitals with influenza in NSW last year also had chronic medical conditions. The 2010 influenza season is likely to start earlier than usual. Vaccination with the pandemic vaccine (Panvax®) provides the best protection against pandemic influenza. Panvax® is available free for anyone from 6 months of age.

WHICH CHILDREN ARE AT INCREASED RISK FROM INFLUENZA?

Children with the following health conditions are at increased risk of severe illness from influenza:

- heart conditions
- chronic lung conditions, including cystic fibrosis and severe asthma
- chronic neurological conditions and severe developmental delay
- a weakened immune system, including from cancer, leukaemia, organ transplants or HIV/AIDS
- a condition that needs oral or injected steroids for more than two weeks
- children receiving long-term medical treatment with aspirin
- other chronic conditions requiring regular doctor visits, including diabetes, kidney or liver disease and blood problems like sickle cell disease or severe anaemia.

Please check with your GP or specialist if your child has a chronic medical condition. It is also very important that children at risk of severe illness from influenza receive a seasonal influenza vaccination every year. For these children, both the pandemic vaccine and seasonal influenza vaccine are available free of charge.

IS THE PANDEMIC INFLUENZA VACCINE SAFE FOR MY CHILD?

Yes. Panvax® is made in the same way as the seasonal influenza vaccine, which has been used for many years in both healthy and high-risk children. It is not a live vaccine so it cannot cause influenza, even in people with a weakened immune system. Any side-effects of Panvax® are usually mild and short-lasting, and can include soreness/redness at the injection site, fever, reduced appetite, muscle aches and headache. These side-effects are not from influenza, but from the immune system reacting to the vaccine.

HOW MANY DOSES DOES MY CHILD NEED?

Children with chronic medical conditions should receive a Panvax® vaccination against pandemic influenza as well as the seasonal influenza vaccine when it becomes available in autumn. Children under 10 years of age who are planning to receive a seasonal vaccine and who have previously received two doses of seasonal vaccine ever, should have one dose of Panvax® and one dose of seasonal influenza vaccine at least 28 days later. Children under 10 years of age who are planning to receive a seasonal vaccine this year but have not previously received a seasonal vaccine (or have only had one dose) should have one dose of Panvax® and two doses of seasonal influenza vaccine with the first dose at least 28 days after Panvax®.

WHERE CAN I GET THE VACCINE?

Panvax® is available from most GPs, Aboriginal Medical Services and hospitals (for in-patients) and some community childhood health centres and council clinics. The seasonal influenza vaccine will be available this autumn. Please call ahead to make sure the practice or clinic can provide the influenza vaccine to your child when you visit.

THE FACTS

- Children with chronic medical conditions are at increased risk of becoming seriously ill if they are infected with influenza.
- Children under 5 years old had the highest rate of hospital admissions from pandemic influenza in NSW in 2009.
- Pandemic influenza and seasonal influenza vaccines are both strongly recommended to protect at risk children against influenza.
- Family members and close carers should also be vaccinated to provide extra protection for children with chronic medical conditions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

NSW Health: <http://www.emergency.health.nsw.gov.au/swineflu/>
Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing: <http://www.healthemergency.gov.au/>
Australian Government pandemic hotline: 1802007