



# Flu vaccine for children

Children with chronic diseases have a higher risk of contracting real viral flu (influenza). Therefore, the Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) recommends that these children be vaccinated against flu every autumn.

## Pathogens and infection

Flu viruses occur worldwide and cause regular flu waves in the winter months. There are different types and variants that also change constantly.

The flu spreads like a cold mainly through droplet infection when sufferers cough or sneeze. But the viruses can also be transmitted via hands and surfaces. Infected people can spread the flu virus one day before the onset of the disease until about a week after the first signs of the disease appear. People with a weakened immune system can also excrete the pathogens for longer.



## Symptoms

One to two days after infection with the flu virus, the first symptoms of the disease appear. Typical for flu is a sudden onset of the disease usually with a high fever, muscle ache and headache. This is often followed by a dry cough. The progression can also be insidious, though. The symptoms usually disappear after five to seven days.

Healthy children and younger adults are generally less likely to develop viral flu. In contrast, children with chronic diseases have an increased risk of getting a severe case of the disease. Flu can cause serious complications, such as pneumonia. Sometimes it can even be fatal.

## STIKO recommendations

STIKO therefore recommends the flu vaccination for all children from 6 months of age who have an increased risk of complications if they get the flu. These include children with certain pre-existing medical conditions, such as:

- Chronic diseases of the respiratory organs (including asthma, cystic fibrosis and others)
- Chronic heart, liver and kidney diseases
- Metabolic diseases, e.g. diabetes mellitus
- Underlying neurological diseases
- Congenital or acquired immunodeficiency or while undergoing immunosuppressive treatment, e.g. with HIV, tumours, immune deficiencies
- Vaccination is also recommended for children who live with chronically ill or immunosuppressed children or adults in a household and could therefore infect them.

Where vaccination against **influenza** and the **coronavirus** are recommended for your child due to an underlying health condition, it is possible to have both jabs administered at the same time.





## Various vaccines

Various vaccines are available for the flu vaccination. Seasonal flu vaccines contain parts of those virus strains that are most likely to occur with the highest incidence in the coming season.

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### Inactivated vaccines

**Children from six months of age** can be injected with an **inactivated vaccine**. **Children up to the age of 9** who have never been vaccinated against the flu before are usually given two vaccinations with a gap of four weeks when using this vaccine (refer to the specific information provided for the relevant vaccine).

### Live vaccine

For **children aged between 2 and 17 years**, a so-called **live vaccine**, which is administered as a nasal spray, can be used as an alternative. This should preferably be given in the case of blood clotting disorders or fear of injections. Nonetheless, the vaccine should not be administered to individuals who have weakened immune systems, who have severe asthma or who are taking certain painkillers or fever reducers (active substance aspirin aka acetylsalicylic acid or ASA).

### Efficacy

As flu viruses constantly change, the vaccine is adapted to the expected virus variants each year according to the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO). However, it is possible that the main flu viruses the following season do not perfectly match the virus strains contained in the vaccine.

In addition, the efficacy of the vaccination depends on the person vaccinated – in healthy children and adolescents, up to three out of four vaccinated people are safely protected. Very young children – just like older people – show a limited response of the immune system to the flu vaccination. This also applies to people with a weakened immune system. In children who develop the flu despite vaccination, the flu is milder and they experience fewer complications than in unvaccinated children.

### Safety

Vaccines are generally well tolerated. Temporary reactions to the vaccination may include pain, redness or swelling at the injection site. The live vaccine can cause a stuffy or runny nose. Both types of vaccines can usually cause symptoms similar to colds for one to two days – for example fever or headache and limb pain.

## How else can I protect my child against the flu?

If your child is particularly at risk of becoming severely ill with the flu due to an underlying medical condition, family members are also recommended to have a flu vaccination. This applies even if the child himself/herself has been vaccinated as the vaccination may have a limited effect.

In addition, good hygiene habits, such as regular hand washing or proper coughing and sneezing, preferably into a disposable handkerchief or into the crook of the arm if a handkerchief is not available, helps to prevent the spread of the flu viruses (as well as other pathogens). Further information on this is available from the BZgA at:

<https://www.infektionsschutz.de/hygienetipps/>

### Wash your hands at regular intervals



- ▶ When you come home
- ▶ Before and during food preparation
- ▶ Before meals
- ▶ After going to the toilet
- ▶ After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- ▶ Before and after contact with sufferers
- ▶ After contact with animals

### More information:

#### Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA):

- ▶ <https://www.impfen-info.de/grippeimpfung/>
- ▶ [www.infektionsschutz.de/erregersteckbriefe/grippe-influenza](http://www.infektionsschutz.de/erregersteckbriefe/grippe-influenza)

#### Robert Koch Institute (RKI):

- ▶ [www.rki.de/influenza-impfung](http://www.rki.de/influenza-impfung)

#### Paul Ehrlich Institute (PEI):

- ▶ [www.pei.de/influenza-impfstoffe](http://www.pei.de/influenza-impfstoffe)

This leaflet is also available to download at the following link:

<https://www.impfen-info.de/mediathek/printmaterialien/grippeimpfung/>



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