

Media Release

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Parents' misconceptions influencing flu vaccine uptake, poll finds

Less than a third of Australian parents are planning to have their child vaccinated against the flu this winter, new research has found.

Although influenza or 'the flu' is the leading cause of hospitalisation due to a vaccine-preventable disease in Australian children under five years, the latest [Australian Child Health Poll](#) has found that more than a quarter (28 per cent) of parents incorrectly believe that healthy kids don't get seriously unwell from the flu and one in six (18 per cent) think that the flu is not a serious disease. Parents who hold these misbeliefs are considerably less likely to be planning to vaccinate their children against the flu this winter.

Director of the Australian Child Health Poll, paediatrician Dr Anthea Rhodes, said that each year in Australia thousands of children become unwell with the flu and more than 1,500 children are hospitalised with flu-related complications. The flu vaccine is recommended for all children over six months of age.

"Children, including healthy children, are more likely to catch the flu than adults (20-30 per cent of children compared to 10-30 per cent of adults) and healthy children under five are the group most likely to be hospitalised for neurological or respiratory complications related to flu," Dr Rhodes said.

"Around half of all children who become seriously unwell and die from the flu are previously healthy children, with no underlying medical conditions.

"The flu vaccine is readily available and safe for children, yet uptake levels are low among Australian families, with only a third of parents telling us that they plan to have their children vaccinated against the flu this season."

The poll suggests that many parents hold misplaced concerns about the flu vaccine, especially in relation to its safety, side effects and effectiveness, and this is influencing their decision to vaccinate their children.

The poll found that:

- Almost nine in ten (88 per cent) parents are unsure about the safety of the flu vaccine
- One in six (18 per cent) parents incorrectly believe that the flu is not a serious disease
- Over a quarter (28 per cent) incorrectly believe that healthy kids don't get seriously unwell from the flu
- Nearly one in ten (eight per cent) parents incorrectly believe that children can get the flu from the flu vaccine, and a quarter (27 per cent) are unsure about this
- Ten per cent of parents believe the flu vaccine does not work well to protect children from the flu and almost half (46 per cent) are unsure about this

"Despite high levels of concern and uncertainty, a minority (28 per cent) of parents have discussed the flu vaccine with a health care provider. All vaccines currently available in Australia, including the flu vaccine,

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must pass stringent safety testing before being approved for use by the Therapeutic Goods Administration,” Dr Rhodes said.

“We were surprised to see how much confusion still exists in the community about catching flu from the flu vaccine, with almost one in 10 (eight per cent) parents subscribing to the myth, and over a quarter (27 per cent) being unsure about this. This is an important reminder to keep educating people that there is no live virus in the flu vaccine so you cannot catch the flu from the flu vaccine!

“Parents should speak with their doctor about the flu vaccine for their child within the next few weeks in order to get the facts and make an informed decision about having their child vaccinated against the flu this winter.”

Dr Rhodes said the poll identified cost as a potential barrier for parents in giving their child the flu vaccine, with around one in five parents saying they could not afford the flu vaccine for their children.

“Half of all parents said they would vaccinate their child if the flu vaccine was free. Universal funded flu vaccine for children has been on the agenda for some time and this poll reinforces the potential for such a program to substantially increase flu vaccine uptake rates,” Dr Rhodes added.

The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone from six months of age, and is free under the National Immunisation Program for people who are at higher risk from flu and its complications.

They include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged between six months and five years, and 15 years and over
- People aged six months and over with medical conditions such as severe asthma, lung or heart disease, low immunity or diabetes
- People over 65 years of age
- Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy.

For more information, including media material, see www.childhealthpoll.org.au

Data Source

The Australian Child Health Poll is a survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,945 adults aged 18 years and older. Collectively respondents had a total of 3,492 children. The survey is conducted by an independent research agency on behalf of The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. Each sample is subsequently weighted to reflect the latest Australian population figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.