



## About Influenza and Children

### Influenza Burden in Children

As reported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a total of 152 children younger than 18 years of age died in the United States from influenza and its complications during the 2003-2004 influenza season.<sup>21\*</sup> Seventy-one percent of these children had no high-risk medical conditions, as defined by the CDC.<sup>21</sup> These troubling statistics are a reminder that, despite the traditional emphasis on high-risk groups, healthy children are also vulnerable to influenza each year – and deaths can occur.

Children have the highest rates of influenza infection of any age group during the influenza season and are important disseminators of the virus into communities.<sup>6, 12, 19</sup> In fact, during an epidemic, influenza attack rates can exceed 30 percent in school-aged children.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, children are rarely vaccinated against influenza.<sup>22</sup>

Since the influenza virus can be spread to others before symptoms even surface,<sup>6</sup> it is not surprising that there is a high incidence of influenza among school-aged children who spend much of their time in close contact with friends and classmates.<sup>12</sup> Not only does the virus affect children, but it can also affect those in close contact with them, including teachers, parents and siblings.<sup>12, 19</sup> In fact, anyone not protected against the influenza virus who comes into contact with an infected person is susceptible to catching it from that person.

### Consider the Impact of Influenza on Children and their Communities

- Because children are less likely to have immunity to influenza virus, they are two to three times more likely to develop influenza.<sup>7</sup>
- In one study, children 5 to 14 years of age were approximately four times more likely to be infected with influenza than adults.<sup>7</sup>
- Influenza vaccination helps to reduce influenza-related missed school days by 47 to 56 percent.<sup>23</sup>
- Children sick with influenza miss approximately 38 million school days annually.<sup>24</sup>
- Not only do children frequently pass influenza on to family members, but they also require care from parents or other family members – contributing to approximately 70 million workdays missed each year due to influenza.<sup>24</sup>

### Prevention of Influenza in Children

Some experts believe vaccinating healthy children against influenza not only helps to protect them, but also helps reduce the risk of spreading influenza to family members and others around them, including the elderly.<sup>26</sup> In fact, researchers have demonstrated that vaccinating approximately 50 to 70 percent of school-aged children would considerably reduce influenza in the general population, thus helping to keep influenza from reaching epidemic levels.<sup>29</sup>

The benefits of widespread vaccination of school-aged children were shown during the period between 1977 and 1987, when immunization of Japanese schoolchildren with inactivated influenza vaccine was mandatory and mortality rates among older persons were reduced (although no vaccination policy for the elderly was in place at that time). However, when the vaccination program for schoolchildren was discontinued, that trend was reversed.<sup>26</sup>

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends all children 6 to 23 months of age and close contacts of children 0 to 6 months of age get vaccinated against influenza during the influenza season.<sup>6</sup> As influenza virus strains vary from year to year, influenza vaccination is recommended annually for anyone who wishes to reduce the chance of getting influenza.<sup>3</sup>

There are risks associated with all vaccines. Not all influenza vaccines are indicated for all patient populations.

\*Total pediatric deaths for the 2004-2005 influenza season were not available from the CDC at the time of print.