

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Bonnie Verhunce

Should Children Be Given the Flu Vaccine?

Some government and medical agencies recommend flu shots for healthy children between the ages of six months and 23 months. But Dr. Bonnie cautions that this recommendation may not be based on scientific evidence. What's more, the flu vaccine is linked to side effects ranging from autism to allergies.

Dr. Bonnie warns against the indiscriminate use of vaccines: particularly those with disputable benefits and well-documented health risks.

No Better Than Placebo

Researchers who analyzed 51 vaccine studies involving a half-million children worldwide recently concluded that “the injection [of inactivated flu vaccine] is no better than a placebo at preventing influenza.” Their collective conclusion was published in the January 2006 issue of *The Cochrane Library*, a publication of The Cochrane Collaboration: a renowned international organization that evaluates medical research (*Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2006;1:CD004879).

Inactivated flu vaccine is the only one approved for the six- to 23-month age group, according to the Cochrane researchers. It includes the virus in its “killed” state, as opposed to the “live” version known as Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV).

One month after the Cochrane review — which included 17 papers translated from Russia for the first time — was published, researchers in Japan noted that “no significant vaccine effectiveness was detected among very young children” who were given inactivated flu vaccine. The study included 2,913 children under the age of 6: 1,512 of whom received inactivated flu vaccine and 1,401 who received no vaccine (*Vaccine* 2006;24:957-63).

The Japanese study supports the conclusion of Cochrane review co-author Sue Smith, M.D., of Oxford University, who said that “national policies for the vaccination of healthy young children are based on very little evidence.”

Is It Safe?

In the process of reviewing the initial studies, the Cochrane authors also noted a particularly disturbing omission. “We were astonished to find only one safety study of inactivated vaccine in children under two years [of age] carried out nearly 30 years ago in 35



children.” So, safety studies are grossly lacking.

Increases Risk of Flu in Later Life

Not only may the flu vaccine fail to prevent the flu in young children, but it may also actually trigger the condition later on in life.

In an article published earlier this year, researchers from France noted that “repeated vaccination at a young age substantially increases the risk of influenza in older age.” In fact, the study found that those who receive repeated flu shots as children are twice as likely to get the flu as adults, compared with those who wait until the age of 50-plus to receive their first flu shot. The researchers concluded that “these findings have important implications for influenza vaccination policies.” (*Epidemiol Infect* 2006;134:63-70.)

This finding is particularly unsettling, because older people tend to have more complications arise from the flu, compared with youngsters.

More on LAIV

According to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV) should not be given to children under the age of 5 or adults over the age of 50 (*MMWR Recomm Rep* 2003;52:1-8). However, some LAIV formulations — such as FluMist™ — are gaining in popularity among individuals over 50 due to widespread advertising campaigns.



**Dr. Bonnie Verhunce, Vitality Chiropractic (206) 824-5521
21904 Marine View Drive South, Des Moines, WA 98198
www.vitalitychiropractic.com**

LAIV is also dangerous for people with asthma, reactive airways disease or other chronic disorders of the pulmonary or cardiovascular systems; persons with other underlying medical conditions, including diabetes, renal dysfunction and hemoglobinopathies (anemia resulting from abnormal hemoglobin levels); or persons with known or suspected immunodeficiency diseases or who are receiving immunosuppressive therapies.

Children over the age of 5 or adolescents who take aspirin or other salicylates (because of the association of Reye's syndrome with wild-type influenza infection) should also avoid LAIV. So should pregnant women and anyone with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome or allergies to eggs.

Mercury and Flu Vaccine

Researchers speculate that the mercury-based preservative thimerosal — used in many inactivated flu vaccine formulas — is linked with autism. “Mercury poisoning and autism both affect the central nervous system.” (*Pediatrics* 2003;111:674-9.)

Thimerosal interrupts growth-factor signaling and interferes with the regulation of normal DNA and gene function: critical to proper neurological development in infants and children (*Mol Psychiatry* 2004;9:1038).

Why was thimerosal added to vaccines in the first place? To prevent spoilage and contamination, a major risk factor when vaccines were first introduced.

Although many developed countries phased out most thimerosal-containing vaccines in 2000, the questionable preservative is still used in the manufacturing of most inactivated flu vaccines, according to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Most vaccines for diphtheria, Japanese encephalitis, meningococcal and some hepatitis B formulas also continue to feature the preservative.

(For more information on thimerosal in vaccines, visit www.fda.gov/CBER/vaccine/thimerosal.htm.)

Thimerosal and Allergies

Thimerosal can also spark dermatological reactions in patients, note researchers in Israel (*Contact Dermatitis* 2005;53:324-6). In fact, according to the Mayo Clinic, thimerosal is one of the top 10 allergens most frequently linked to positive allergic reactions (*J Am Acad Dermatol* 2005;53:416-21).

The Chiropractic Lifestyle Boosts Immune Function

It's a fact: A strong immune system is less vulnerable to disease and illness.

When the spine is healthy, both the nervous and immune systems benefit: a connection known as psychoneuro-immunology. “In practice, most chiropractors also emphasize the role of diet, exercise and lifestyle modification as an adjunct to the healing process. As such, chiropractic is well positioned to make a unique contribution to the field of psychoneuroimmunology.” (*JVSR* 2005:1-7.)

To squash the flu bug in its nasty little tracks, reinforce your child's immune system with proper nutrition, plenty of sleep and — of course — regular chiropractic visits.

Think for Yourself

Numerous studies reveal a well-orchestrated effort by government and

medical agencies to persuade reluctant parents to have their children vaccinated. “A clear message that the doctor recommends influenza vaccination for a child is an important factor for ensuring vaccination and may foster the idea that vaccination is ‘smart.’” (*Am J Prev Med* 2005;29:210-4.)

Another study noted that “enthusiastic staff support may result in higher vaccination rates.” (*Am J Manag Care* 2005;11:717-24.)

The subtle insinuation in the above-cited references, as well as countless others, is that if parents don't vaccinate their children, they are bad parents.

Doctors of chiropractic believe in the open and honest exchange of research data. The key is not to take any doctor's “word for it” when it comes to your child's health. Instead, gather as much research information as possible before arriving at your own conclusion. Our office will support you in doing just that.

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