

Provider: So before you leave today would you like Jaden to get a flu vaccine?

Parent: Oh, Jaden already had 2 flu shots in March, so he doesn't need another one until next spring.

Provider: Ah, I'm glad to hear that he had his flu shots last spring. But it's time for another one now. The influenza season every year goes from September-June, so the flu shots he got in March only protected him until June. If he hasn't had one since school started, then he needs a new one now.

Parent: But it's already December now, isn't it too late?

Provider: Most flu cases don't start until early January and the peak is in February, so we like to give flu shots as early as possible but even as late as June.

Parent: Oh... Well, Jaden isn't feeling too well today. He has the sniffles. So we should probably wait until he feels better, right?

Provider: Actually, it's ok to get the flu shot when you have a minor illness like a cold or the sniffles, as long as he doesn't have a fever today. It takes about 2 weeks for the flu shot to start working so if he gets it today it will start working by January. That way, he will be protected before the influenza season starts.

Parent: Well, it seems like every time he gets the flu shot, he still gets sick. I think the flu shot makes him sick?

Provider: Well, the vaccine is not made with a live virus so it actually can't make you sick. In fact, the nasal spray is made from a weakened virus and the injection type is made from an inactivated virus. So the flu shot is very safe and you can't catch the flu from the vaccine. BUT there are many many viruses floating around, especially this time of year, when you notice everyone on the bus and the subway coughing, right? Remember that influenza itself doesn't even start until January so those people on the subway and the bus have some other winter virus right now. So between the time he gets the flu shot today and 2 weeks from today, he can still get sick from any of those other viruses.

Parent: So the flu shot won't make Jaden sick?

Provider: When he got sick after getting the shot last time, he probably caught one of those other viruses, which made him feel bad, but not as bad as he will feel if he catches the actual flu! At most, he will have some soreness or redness at the injection site, which you can use an ice pack for, and he might have a mild fever or

headache, but nothing more. Catching the flu is much worse than the side effects of the flu shot. Remember that the flu shot only protects you from one type of virus-- the influenza virus. We can't protect ourselves from all those other viruses but we have a vaccine for this one so we should take advantage of it.

Parent: Can I choose if he gets the shot or the nasal spray?

Provider: Children younger than six months old are too young for either. Since Jaden is older than 2 years old and he doesn't have asthma, he can get the nasal spray type. Children who might have asthma, people with other long-term health problems like heart disease or kidney disease and pregnant women shouldn't get the nasal spray type.

Parent: Well, I guess we should do it today but he's not going to like it.

Provider: Maybe not, but he won't like being sick from catching the flu any more so you're doing the right thing for Jaden.

Parent: Well, a friend of mine told me she wasn't going to get the flu shot for her child this year because she said the H1N1 was combined with the regular flu shot and she doesn't want her child to get the H1N1 shot.

Provider: Oh that's interesting. Do you know how they make the flu shot?

Parent: No?

Provider: Well, every year the CDC predicts which strains of influenza to put into each year's new vaccine based on the strains from the year before. The different strains have names like H2N3, H1N3, H3N2. So H1N1 is just another strain of the influenza virus. Last year, they didn't figure out the H1N1 strain in time to include it in the regular seasonal vaccine. And since they thought it was important enough, people had to get a separate H1N1 vaccine to be protected against it. This year, they figured out all the strains in time for this season's vaccine, so that's why it's all just one vaccine.

Parent: Ohhh, so H1N1 isn't a different kind of influenza?

Provider: No, just a different strain of influenza. Some strains are worse than others, but it's all influenza. So you should tell your friend that young children like Jaden could get very very sick if they catch any of the strains of influenza so it's very important to get the vaccine. In fact, every year many people are hospitalized with influenza and some children actually die from it. And it's a very effective vaccine so it's a shame that people are scared of it for the wrong reasons... Okay,

so I put the order into the computer and the nurse will give Jaden the shot as soon as she has it ready. Sound okay?