

Lewis County Public Health

School-Located Immunization Q & A

What is School-Located Immunization?

School-Located Immunization Programs (SIPs) are mass influenza immunization clinics conducted at schools. Well conducted SIPs can vaccinate large numbers of children in a very short period of time. SIPs can also vaccinate teachers and school staff. SIPs can vaccinate with either the live influenza vaccine, sprayed into the nose, or the inactivated influenza vaccine, given by an injection into the arm.

Why do school children need to be immunized against influenza?

Children have the highest risk becoming sick with influenza. Influenza is usually a very bad cold, but complications can include cause ear infections, sinus infections and pneumonia. Influenza often triggers asthma attacks in asthmatic children. A small number of school-aged children die from influenza each year. Rarely, serious antibiotic-resistant staph (MRSA) infections can occur together with influenza. Vaccines are very effective in preventing influenza in school-aged children.

Why can't school-aged children get immunized against influenza at their doctor or a public clinic?

Children can get immunized by their regular medical providers, however private medical practitioners don't have the capacity to immunize this large number of children.

What are the advantages of school-located immunization?

Because children are already in school and can be accessed efficiently, SIPs can reach large numbers of children at a low cost.

What is the benefit to the child of being immunized against influenza?

Immunized children are much less likely to get sick from influenza. They are much less likely to miss school; have fewer visits to the doctors and prescriptions for antibiotics; and use less over-the-counter cold medicines.

Are there advantages for parents?

During influenza season, vaccinated children are less sick than children who are not vaccinated. Families of vaccinated children are also less ill during influenza season – even family members

who are unvaccinated. Parents will miss less work to stay home to care for a sick child or because they are ill themselves. It also means fewer doctor visits, prescriptions and over-the-counter cold medicines and less money spent on getting well.

SIPs are convenient for parents because there's no need to take time off work or spend weekend time driving their children to the doctor's office or another clinic and then waiting their turn to be vaccinated.

Are their advantages for schools?

School-based influenza immunization programs reduce illness and absenteeism among the immunized students. Because vaccination reduces spread of the influenza virus from sick children, there is also less illness among unvaccinated children and school staff. Fewer absent children may increase reimbursement from the state. Fewer absent teachers may reduce expenditures for substitute teachers. Keeping students and teachers in school allows schools to better fulfill their primary mission – to provide the best education possible for our children.

Are there any dangers from getting vaccinated?

Children who get a flu shot may have a sore arm, redness over the site where the injection was given, a low fever and may just not feel well for a day or two. Children who get the nasal spray vaccine may have a runny nose for a day or two. Some people, especially teenage girls, faint after getting shots.

Who should not get immunized against influenza?

Children who have serious allergies to eggs or other components of the vaccines should not receive an influenza immunization. The nasal spray vaccine can only be given to healthy children. Children who have asthma or other chronic medical condition as well as pregnant women should receive the vaccine at their medical provider's office.

Can influenza virus be spread from vaccinated to unvaccinated children?

The flu shot, given by injection, is made from influenza virus that has been killed and cannot be spread. The nasal spray vaccine contains a live virus that has been made very weak. The vaccine virus will be present in the nose of a vaccinated child for several days. The live virus in the vaccine is very stable and will not cause disease even if spread does occur.

Does the flu shot contain mercury?

The flu shot used in school based clinics contains a very small amount of thimerosal, a mercury compound. Some people think that thimerosal causes autism, but scientific studies show that thimerosal does not cause autism. The nasal spray vaccine does not contain thimerosal.