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LAIV (Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine) “Nasal Spray” / “Flumist” Frequently Asked Questions

As you may be aware, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recently voted in favor of an interim recommendation that live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), also known as the “nasal spray” flu vaccine, should not be used during the 2016-2017 flu season due to ineffectiveness.

Why is Flumist not being offered this year?

Over the last few flu seasons, Flumist has shown poor or lower than expected effectiveness. During the 2015-2016 season, Flumist was only 3% effective among children 2-17 years at preventing flu, whereas flu shots were 63% effective. To ensure that all Rhode Islanders get the best protection available, the Department of Health is only supplying injectable vaccine (the “flu shot”) this year.

If Flumist has not been effective the past few years, why was it previously recommended?

Vaccine experts try to predict which flu viruses will circulate during a given season based on data from previous seasons. Experts must decide which viruses to include in the flu vaccine many months in advance in order for vaccine to be produced and delivered on time. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know exactly which viruses will dominate in a given year. The recommendation of Flumist in past years was based on prior seasons' data showing a high level of effectiveness. More recent data has shown a very low level of effectiveness, and therefore, the CDC is only recommending injectable vaccine this year.

How do I know the flu shot will work if its recommendation is also based on past seasons' data?

The CDC always uses the most current data to make its vaccine recommendations each season. The most recent data for injectable flu vaccine has shown a high level of effectiveness at 63%. While the level of effectiveness varies from year to year, getting vaccinated is always better than having no protection at all.

So should I still bother getting the flu shot?

Yes, all children and adults should get the flu shot every year. Flu vaccine is safe and is the best defense against the flu. If you do get the flu after being vaccinated, your illness will be milder and you will be at lower risk of serious outcomes such as hospitalization and death. Vaccination can also provide protection against different but related viruses that also cause flu-like symptoms. Research shows that overall, those who get vaccinated are better off than those who do not.

