Effectiveness of Influenza Vaccines for Healthy Children

by Pamela Jones, MA

Children and the elderly are susceptible to developing serious complications from being infected with the flu virus. As a result, there is a major public health campaign to have the elderly and young children vaccinated. General recommendations for children include immunization of healthy children between six months and 23 months of age. As with any treatment it is important to understand the benefits and risk of the vaccine.

The Cochrane Library is an organization that gathers information from several smaller studies in hopes of providing better answers to medical issues. In their review of the influenza vaccine for young children, they found that the vaccine works well against the influenza viruses, but not against flu-like illness from other viruses. In addition, children under two years of age did not appear to have the same benefits as there counterparts over two years old.

About the Study

The systematic review examined 51 randomized, controlled studies with 294,159 participants. The review extracted information about the vaccine’s ability to prevent flu from the influenza virus (efficacy). The review found the following:

- Live vaccines (nasal spray) prevented flu from the influenza virus in 82% of recipients.
- Inactivated vaccines (injection) prevented flu from the influenza virus in 59% of recipients.
- In children under two years of age the efficacy of the vaccine was similar to placebo.

How Does This Affect You?

Influenza vaccination is a major public health initiative to decrease complications from the flu. More studies need to be done to determine the ability of the vaccine to truly impact serious illness and death rates from the flu in the vulnerable populations. Further research also needs to be done on specific age groups that benefit from the vaccination and whether there is a better choice between live and inactive vaccines.

The study focused on healthy children. Certain health conditions increase the risk of serious complications from the flu. Talk to your child's doctor about your child’s specific needs.

RESOURCES:

American Academy of Family Physicians
http://familydoctor.org/

Center for Disease Control (CDC)
http://www.cdc.gov/FLU/

REFERENCES:


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