



# Fighting Influenza

The Official Newsletter of Families Fighting Flu

Winter/Spring 2008

## WHO WE ARE

Families Fighting Flu, Inc. (FFF) is a non-profit, volunteer-based corporation established in 2004 that is made up of families and health-care practitioners who have experienced first-hand the death of a child due to the flu, or have had a child experience severe medical complications from the flu. FFF is dedicated to educating people about the severity of influenza and the importance of vaccinating children against the flu every year. The organization's efforts are focused on urging the CDC to change the current influenza vaccination recommendations to include all healthy children 18 years old and younger. Through education and advocacy, we hope to improve the rates of annual childhood influenza vaccinations and help reduce the number of childhood illnesses and deaths caused by the flu each year.

Families Fighting Flu, Inc. is made possible by unrestricted grants from MedImmune, Inc., GlaxoSmithKline, sanofi pasteur, Novartis Vaccines, CSL Biotherapies, and The Clorox Company.

To contact Families Fighting Flu, please call 1-888-2ENDFLU or email us at [familiesfightingflu@ketchum.com](mailto:familiesfightingflu@ketchum.com)

## FFF Flashback

### A Look Back at Families Fighting Flu's 2007 Influenza Awareness Initiatives

Families Fighting Flu (FFF) has been very busy this flu season raising awareness nationwide about the severity of influenza ("the flu") and the critical importance of annual flu vaccinations, especially for children. Since September 2007, FFF has partnered with several organizations to launch four major influenza awareness campaigns, resulting in thousands of flu vaccinations to date and reaching millions of people with flu awareness and prevention information. And flu season hasn't even peaked yet! Please read on for further information about each of our important influenza programs.

participating in a program that vaccinated more than 3,600 children and families across the country. The traveling vaccination tour made stops in 15 different cities - from Boston to San

Halloween-themed events and conducted local media interviews. The campaign was featured in publications from *PARADE* to *The Washington Post*, and overall media

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Francisco - throughout October, where nurses from local VNAA chapters vaccinated families and educated them about the importance of flu prevention.

impressions surpassed 350 million! To learn more about the program, go to [www.SayBoototheFlu.com](http://www.SayBoototheFlu.com).

### Spread the Word - NOT the Flu!

FFF joined forces with Novartis Vaccines and Weekly Reader Corporation Custom Publishing to "Spread the Word - NOT the Flu" via an influenza

To kick off the program, FFF participated in multiple broadcast interviews with the VNAA, at both the national and local levels. FFF members in local cities also attended the family-friendly,

*continued on page 3*

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- FFF Flashback ..... 1
- Who We Are..... 1
- The Flu: Fact vs Fiction ..... 2
- Who Should Get Vaccinated... 2
- Alana's Story ..... 3
- Influenza Activity in the U.S... 4
- Flu Related Resources ..... 5
- Upcoming Events ..... 6

## ACIP RECOMMENDATIONS: WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED?

FFF's goal is to reduce the number of childhood illnesses and deaths caused by the flu each year. This can be achieved in part by urging the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to expand the current flu vaccination recommendations to include all healthy children 18 years old and younger. FFF believes that healthcare practitioners follow the CDC's recommendations, and expanding current recommendations will lead doctors to provide annual flu vaccinations for their patients, thus saving more lives.

The ACIP currently recommends that all children from six months up to five years get vaccinated against the flu. However, the CDC also states that all persons, including school-aged children, who want to reduce the risk of becoming ill with the flu or transmitting it to others, should get vaccinated every year.

During the upcoming ACIP meeting in February, the Committee will discuss and potentially vote on expanding the current influenza vaccination recommendations. To learn more about the ACIP's immunization recommendations, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/acip/index.htm>.



# Myths & Misconceptions

## THE FLU: FACT VERSUS FICTION

### Myth #1: You can get the flu from the flu shot.

**FALSE** - This is impossible. The flu shot does not actually carry a live virus; it contains inactivated organisms. Vaccine manufacturers grow the flu virus in eggs, then cleanse and chemically treat the virus to deactivate it.

### Myth #2: The flu is just a bad cold.

**FALSE** - The flu is a serious disease. It is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract (nose, throat, and lungs). In the United States, about 200,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die each year because of

the flu. Influenza kills more Americans every year than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined.

### Myth #3: It is not necessary for children to receive a flu vaccination.

**FALSE** - Children are two-to-three times more likely to develop influenza than adults because of their

children have died from the flu - and 94 percent of those children were not vaccinated! Families Fighting Flu strongly urges parents to get their children vaccinated against the flu every year. It could save their lives.

### Myth #4: The side effects of the vaccine are worse than the flu itself.

## Influenza kills more Americans every year than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined.

less-developed immune systems. More than 20,000 children under the age of five are hospitalized due to the flu each year. In the last four flu seasons alone, more than 300

**FALSE** - Most people who get the flu shot have no reaction. Up to 25 percent may have some redness and slight swelling at

*continued on page 6*



## flashback

(continued from page 1)

curriculum distributed to students in 10,000 schools nationwide. As part of the program, FFF spokespersons again conducted national and local media interviews to disseminate flu prevention messages, and FFF members were featured in local broadcast and print media interviews in their hometown markets.

The educational program reached students in grades three through eight and featured engaging activities to test kids' flu IQ, such as a "Flu or False" questionnaire. Students also got the chance to compete in an Influenza Ambassador Award Contest in which they created a public service announcement to educate the public on the dangers of influenza and explain how to help prevent its spread. FFF members assisted in judging the final entries, and the contest winner will receive a laptop computer and/or a college scholarship of up to \$15,000!

The "Spread the Word – NOT the Flu" campaign empowered students to become the flu gurus of their families and communities by providing them with the knowledge

to educate others. The word certainly got out, as the campaign secured more than 14 million media impressions and garnered overwhelmingly positive feedback from more than 500 teachers across the country.

For more information or to download the Weekly Reader packets that were distributed to schools, go to [www.SpreadTheWordNotTheFlu.com](http://www.SpreadTheWordNotTheFlu.com).

### **Fighting Flu in Child Care Settings: Building Blocks to Increase Influenza Awareness**

FFF also partnered with the National Association of Child Care Professionals (NACCP) this flu season to educate parents and child care providers about the seriousness of the flu and to increase flu vaccination rates among children in child care centers. Since children in these facilities spend a lot of time interacting with other kids and adults, it is especially important to teach child care providers and parents about preventive practices to help keep children healthy during flu season!

With an educational grant from sanofi pasteur, this campaign challenged child care center directors to set flu vaccination goals within their centers.

In early October, more than 1,700 NACCP-affiliated centers in the U.S. and Canada received colorful "Prevent Flu – Get Vaccinated" kits containing materials such as brochures and posters in both English and Spanish. The materials, which were distributed to parents and displayed within the centers, enabled parents to access important information on how to protect their children from influenza by getting them vaccinated against the flu, and encouraged healthy flu prevention practices.

Child care center directors are currently tracking the number of influenza vaccinations received by children at their centers throughout the season, with the hope of reaching their center's goal number of vaccinations. For more information or to download a campaign fact sheet in English or in Spanish, go to [www.nacpp.org](http://www.nacpp.org) and [www.familiesfightingflu.org](http://www.familiesfightingflu.org).

## ALANA'S STORY



Every fall, we ask family, friends and acquaintances, "Did you get your flu shot this year?" Unfortunately, the answer we often

hear is "No, why would I do that? I don't get the flu."

Well, that is exactly what we thought. Then, on February 3, 2003, the unthinkable happened to our family and in fact our entire community. It was that day that our 5 1/2 year old niece, Alana, died within 18 hours of being diagnosed with influenza. Instantly, your world is turned upside down, nothing makes sense, and you just go numb. Then, the questions start: How can this happen? Why did this happen? How many people has this happened to in the past and how do you begin to pick up the pieces?

With little to no information readily available, you feel helpless. Then the opportunity to be one of the founding members of Families Fighting Flu came our way. Unsure what this opportunity was all about, we decided it was a blessing as it has allowed us to direct our pain in a productive way. Through FFF, we met others who experienced the same tragic loss of a child. Suddenly someone could relate to how we were feeling and what we were going through.

Although nothing can prepare you for the devastation that comes with the loss of a child, being involved with FFF has brought us a certain kind of peace knowing we are making a powerful dif-

*continued on page 5*

*continued on page 6*

# Influenza Activity in the U.S.

## 2007-2008 Current Disease Activity

According to the CDC's December 29, 2007 (week 52) Weekly Influenza Surveillance Reports, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>, influenza has been reported this season in 47 states. In addition, of all deaths reported through the organization's 122-Cities Mortality Reporting System for week 52, 6.6 percent have been due to pneumonia and influenza. This percentage is below the epidemic threshold of 6.8 percent.

Everyone should receive an annual influenza vaccination, but it is especially important for children to get vaccinated against this virus. Children are two-to-three times more likely to get sick with influenza than adults because of their less-developed immune systems. Studies show that otherwise healthy but unvaccinated daycare and school-age children are prime targets for influenza.

## Pediatric Deaths

So far this flu season, one influenza-associated pediatric death has been reported. Last flu season (2006-2007), a total of 74 deaths associated with influenza infections were reported to the CDC in children less than 18 years. These deaths were reported in 26 states: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, Chicago, and New York City. All children had laboratory-confirmed influenza virus infection. As of August 2007, the CDC reported age-specific

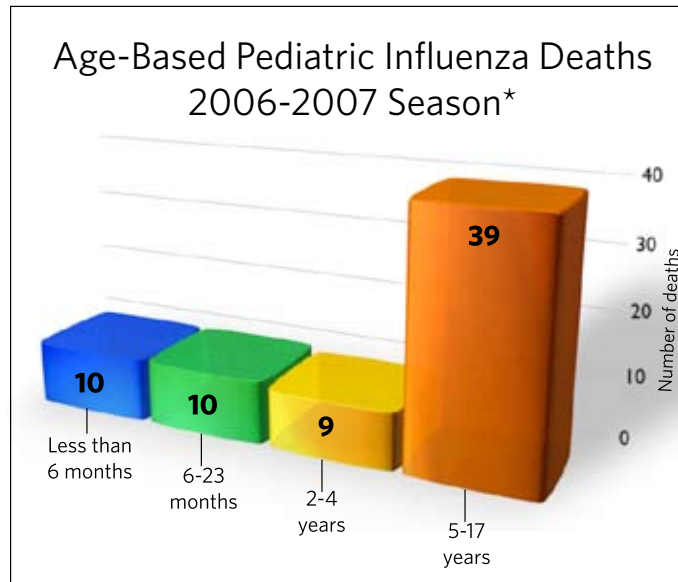
information about 68 of the 74 pediatric deaths. Of these pediatric deaths, 10 were <6 months, 10 were 6-23 months, 9 were 2-4 years, and 39 were 5-17 years of age.

## Pediatric Flu Vaccination Rates

Flu vaccination rates among children remain extremely low despite current recommendations. Only 18 percent of children aged 6-23 months are fully vaccinated against the flu. The numbers are similar for older children; only 35 percent of chil-

dren 2-17 years with any high risk condition are vaccinated against the flu every year. For children 2-17 years who do not have any high risk condition, the vaccination rate is even lower, at 12.6 percent.

These vaccination rates can be increased by expanding current recommendations to include all children 18 years old and younger. More than 300 children have died from influenza over the past four flu seasons.



\*Information reported as of August 2007.

These unnecessary deaths might have been avoided with a simple annual flu vaccination.

Expanding the flu vaccine recommendation to "all children under age 18" would also reduce confusion among medical professionals and the public as to who should be vaccinated.

Other ways to increase vaccination rates among children include: increasing educational outreach efforts to parents, guardians and healthcare professionals to inform them about the seriousness of this deadly virus; urging healthcare professionals to utilize every opportunity to vaccinate; and, increasing access to the vaccine.

## FLU-RELATED RESOURCES

The following organizations are valuable resources for additional information about influenza:

**National Influenza Vaccine Summit**  
[www.preventinfluenza.org](http://www.preventinfluenza.org)

**American Medical Association**  
[www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

**American Academy of Pediatrics**  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

**American Lung Association**  
[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

**Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition**  
[www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org](http://www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org)

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Every Child By Two**  
[www.ecbt.org](http://www.ecbt.org)

**Immunization Action Coalition**  
[www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org)

**National Foundation for Infectious Diseases**  
[www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org)

**National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases**  
[www.niaid.nih.gov](http://www.niaid.nih.gov)

**National Network for Immunization Information**  
[www.nnii.org](http://www.nnii.org)

**PKIDs (Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases)**  
[www.pkids.org](http://www.pkids.org)  
[www.getvaxed.org](http://www.getvaxed.org)

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### Children's Flu Vaccination Day and National Influenza Vaccination Week

FFF was very pleased to work with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish the first ever national Children's Flu Vaccination Day in November. Held on the Tuesday of the CDC's annual National Influenza Vaccination Week, the day sought to raise awareness about the seriousness of influenza in children, and encourage parents and family members to get themselves, their children, and household contacts vaccinated against the flu.

To kick-off Children's Flu Vaccination Day, FFF members traveled to Atlanta to participate in media events, including a local press briefing with the CDC and Georgia health officials, and a joint satellite/radio media tour with the CDC and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases' (NFID) Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition (CIIC). The interviews emphasized the need to protect children from influenza and reached an audience of more than 800,000

to date with airings still pending in several markets. CDC's Director, Dr. Julie Gerberding, also participated in a national interview on CNN's "American Morning."

Back in their local communities, FFF members also conducted local media interviews and reached out to schools and

program partners, we were able to share our personal stories and spread our message to a national audience. But more work is to be done! Stay tuned for updates and more outreach in 2008.

In the meantime, if you have not done so, please get yourself and your children vaccinated

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PTA groups to spread the word that there is still time to get vaccinated against the flu (the flu usually peaks in February).

For more information about Children's Flu Vaccination Day and National Influenza Vaccination Week, go to [www.cdc.gov/flu/nivw/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/nivw/) or [www.familiesfightingflu.org](http://www.familiesfightingflu.org).

As we look back on 2007, FFF is encouraged by the progress we've made in the fight against the flu. With the help of our

against influenza. It could save your child's life.

For more information about Families Fighting Flu, visit [www.familiesfightingflu.org](http://www.familiesfightingflu.org).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- FFF will be testifying at the CDC's ACIP Meeting on February 27-28 in Atlanta, GA.
- FFF will be exhibiting at the CDC's 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual National Immunization Conference (NIC) from March 17-20 in Atlanta, GA. To learn more about this conference please visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/nic/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/nic/default.htm).
- FFF will be attending this year's National Influenza Vaccine Summit from May 12-13 in Chicago, IL. To learn more about this summit please visit [www.preventinfluenza.org/nivs.asp](http://www.preventinfluenza.org/nivs.asp)

## alana

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ference so that no family has to endure what we have gone through. Our voices are stronger and our message has more impact: Influenza kills, but you can protect yourself and your family by being immunized every year. If even one family is motivated to take action, then we know that we have made a meaningful impact on the lives of others and perhaps Alana may not have died in vain.

*Daena Nicholas and JoAnna Yaksich,  
Alana's Aunts*

## myths

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the site of injection; the risk of a severe allergic reaction in those who receive a vaccination is less than one in four million.

**Myth #5: You must be vaccinated in the Fall to be protected against the flu.**

### More than 20,000 children under the age of five are hospitalized due to the flu each year.

**FALSE** - The flu vaccine can be given before and during the flu season.

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.

**Myth #6: Only older people need the flu vaccine.**

**FALSE** - People who meet the high risk criteria and recommended groups should get the flu vaccine, including the elderly, as well as all people who want to reduce their risk of contracting the flu.

**Myth #7: Taking vitamin C or Echinacea will prevent the flu.**

**FALSE** - There is no conclusive evidence that these treatments are effective against the flu.

**Myth #8: The flu vaccine is 100 percent effective in preventing the flu.**

**FALSE** - Although influenza vaccination is not 100 percent effective, it's important that everyone get vaccinated against the flu, including kids, parents, grandparents and other household contacts, to help

reduce the spread of the virus in the community. The more people who get vaccinated against the flu every year, the lower the risk of catching the flu.

**Myth #9: Getting the influenza vaccine every year isn't necessary.**

**FALSE** - The vaccination needs to be given every year. The flu virus mutates from year to year, so a vaccination from last season is ineffective against this year's strains.

**Myth #10: Healthy people don't need a flu shot.**

**FALSE** - The CDC recommends that all individuals, including school-aged children who want to reduce their risk of becoming ill with the flu or transmitting it to their loved ones get vaccinated - every year.

### Join Our Cause

Please visit  
[www.familiesfightingflu.org](http://www.familiesfightingflu.org) or  
call 1-888-2ENDFLU to find out  
how to get involved.