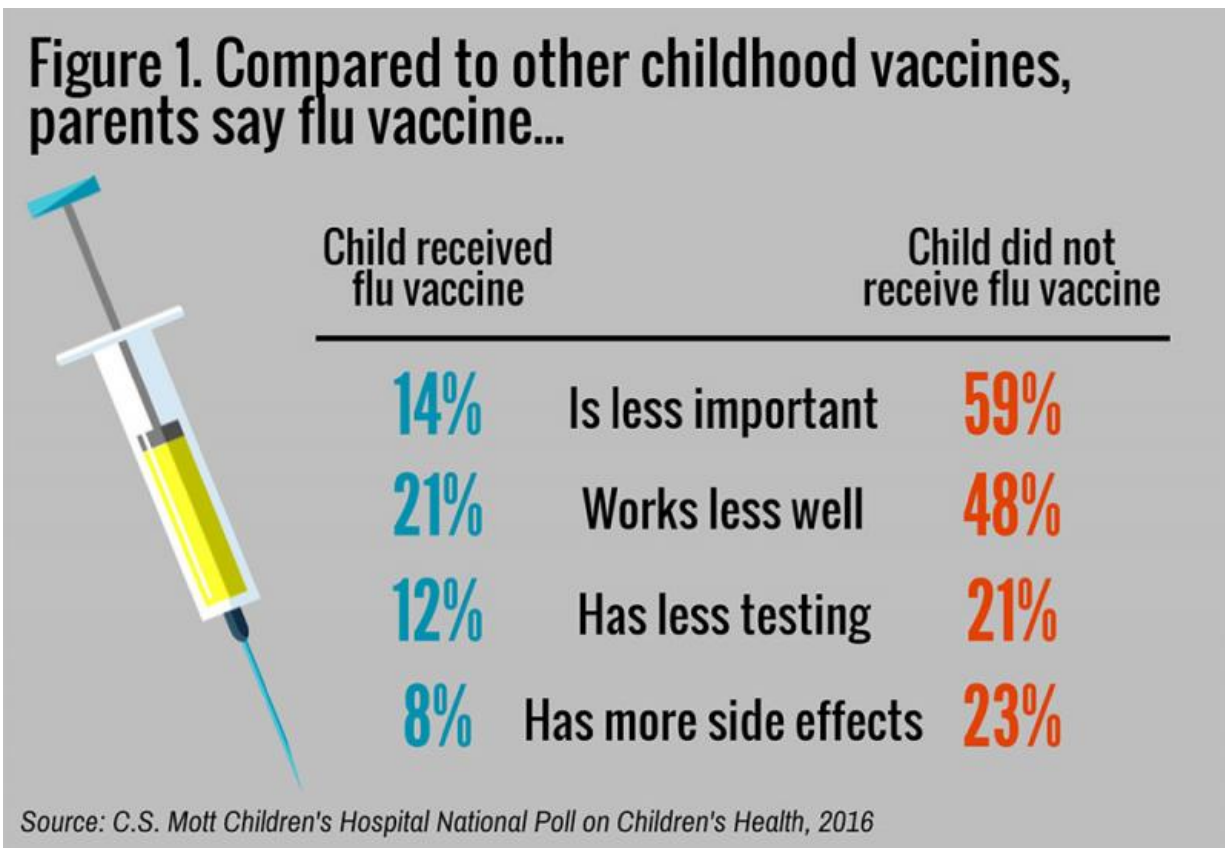


Parents rate flu vaccine less important, effective, safe than other childhood vaccines

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Parents who do not get their children flu shots rate flu vaccine less favorably than other childhood vaccines, national poll finds. Credit: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Parents who do not get their children flu shots rate the flu vaccine less

favorably than other childhood vaccines, a national poll finds.

Fifty-nine percent of [parents](#) whose child did not receive the flu vaccine this season say it is less important than other [childhood vaccines](#) - compared to only 14 percent of parents whose child got a [flu shot](#), according to today's report from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

"Despite substantial public health efforts, flu vaccine rates for U.S. children are well below national targets," says lead author Sarah J. Clark, M.P.H., associate director of the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health and associate research scientist in the U-M Department of Pediatrics. "In exploring why some parents do not have their child get the flu vaccine, we found that many parents do not believe that flu vaccine is as safe, effective or important as the other vaccines their children receive."

Annual flu shots have been recommended for all children 6 months to 18 years since 2008 but flu vaccination rates lag behind measles, polio and most other childhood vaccines. Roughly half (52 percent) of parents polled reported that their child has received flu vaccine this season. Compared to those parents, parents whose child did not get flu vaccine reported far more negative beliefs about flu vaccine relative to other childhood vaccines.

Nearly half (48 percent) of parents whose child did not receive flu vaccine say that flu vaccine does not work as well as other childhood vaccines. These parents also expressed concerns about the safety of flu vaccine, with 21 percent believing flu vaccine has less testing and 23 percent that flu vaccine has more side effects, compared to other childhood vaccines.

"The flu vaccine is unlike other recommended childhood vaccines in

ways that can be confusing to parents," says Clark, who is also with U-M's Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit (CHEAR). "For example, parents generally expect that vaccines will prevent their child from getting a disease. But getting a flu shot for your child does not guarantee he or she won't get the flu, though generally, vaccinated children will have a less severe case. This is a complicated concept that is different than the way we explain the effectiveness of other childhood vaccines. This may lead parents to wrongly believe that the flu vaccine doesn't work."

Roughly 20,000 children under age five are hospitalized each year because of influenza complications, with some illnesses leading to death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services this month confirmed the state's first pediatric flu death of the season.

"Our poll findings are evidence that many parents don't realize that influenza can be a deadly disease for children," Clark says. "The belief that flu vaccine is less important than other childhood vaccines was endorsed by 3 in 5 parents of children who have not received flu vaccine this year."

Parents also perceive a difference in how [health care providers](#) talk about flu vaccine. In this poll, parents whose child did not get a flu shot this season were three times more likely than parents of a vaccinated child to say their child's doctor recommends flu vaccine less strongly than other vaccines (32 percent versus 9 percent).

"Health care providers can play an important role in addressing parents' negative beliefs about flu vaccine. To do so, they should fully explain and strongly recommend an annual [flu vaccine](#) for all [children](#)."

More information: umhealth.me/MottNPCHFlu

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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