ASTHMA is a common chronic inflammatory disease that affects the lungs, causing repeated episodes of wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath. An estimated 9.5% of children and 9.6% of adults in Indiana currently have asthma.\(^1\)

INFLUENZA is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. It is spread by respiratory droplets from close contact with infected persons or contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. In the United States, an estimated 5–20% of the population gets the flu each year, or approximately 15–62 million people.\(^2\)

Increased risk of complications

Having asthma does not increase the chance of getting the flu, but it does increase the risk of flu-related complications, even if asthma is well-controlled.\(^3,4\)

- Asthma causes airways to swell and be more reactive and sensitive.
- Influenza further increases airway inflammation, which can exacerbate asthma.

Flu vaccine recommendations\(^5\)

**Who?**

- All persons 6 months of age and older

**What?**

- People with asthma or other chronic lung disorders should be given the inactivated (killed) flu virus as a SHOT and not the nasal spray/mist.

**When?**

- Every influenza season
- Children between the ages of 6 months and 8 years may need two doses to be protected.

**Where?**

- Health care provider, flu shot clinic, health department, walk-in clinic, pharmacy

**Why?**

- Influenza is vaccine preventable, which can prevent illness, hospitalizations and even death.

**Is the flu shot safe?**

- Yes. The vaccine is safe and effective in children and adults with asthma.\(^5\)
- The inactivated vaccine does not increase asthma exacerbations.\(^6,7,8\)
- Flu shots do not contain a live virus so you cannot get the flu from the shot.
- People with asthma need to tell the person administering the vaccine about their asthma and other conditions such as allergies to eggs or latex.

Influenza Hospital Discharge Data, 2009-2010\(^1,10\)

- 1 in 4 flu hospitalizations involved individuals with asthma
- 2,557 ED visits were from asthma and flu
- 567 hospitalizations were from asthma and flu

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**Figure 1.** Percent of influenza vaccination among people with asthma*, Indiana 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children (0-17 years), 2006–2010</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults (18+ years), 2010</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly one-half of Indiana adults (51.2%) and children (45.6%) who currently* have asthma receive a flu vaccination [Fig 1].

Male children account for 77.0% of emergency department (ED) visits for flu and asthma\(^†\) compared to 47.2% of female children [Fig 2].

**Figure 2.** Distribution of emergency department visits for asthma and flu†, by age group and sex, Indiana, 2009-2010 10

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*Among adults and children who currently have asthma

†Includes patients who had an asthma and flu diagnosis in the top 5 charges
Symptoms of Influenza
A health care provider can diagnose influenza by checking the symptoms or by swabbing the nose and testing for the influenza virus.

Symptoms include:
- Chills
- Headache
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches

Influenza treatment for people with asthma
- If flu symptoms are present, seek medical care.
- Flu antiviral drugs can make flu illness milder and speed up recovery. Take them if your doctor recommends them.
- Treatment should begin as soon as possible (within 48 hours after symptoms start).
- People with asthma should not take zanamivir (Relenza®), an antiviral drug, because there is a risk it may cause wheezing in people that already have asthma or other lung problems.  

TAKE ACTION: If you have asthma, you need to take steps to fight the flu
- Everyone 6 months and older should get the flu shot, NOT the flu mist vaccine.
- There is not a licensed flu vaccine for children under 6 months of age.
- Practice good respiratory hygiene.
  - Use your elbow, upper arm, or a tissue to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
  - Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing or sneezing.
  - Use alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water are not available.
  - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
  - Stay home when you are sick (except to get medical care) to prevent the disease from spreading to others.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth (germs are spread that way).
- Children (0-17 years) and adults over 65 years should also get the pneumococcal vaccine to protect against pneumonia.
- Follow an updated, written Asthma Action Plan developed with your doctor to manage and control asthma.

Community resources
- The Flu Shot Locator provides a searchable map to locate flu vaccination clinics.
- Local health departments can also provide locations for community vaccination clinics.
- For more information about the vaccine or virus http://www.in.gov/flu/.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s has information and resources on asthma and influenza.
- To learn more about the impact of influenza, visit the Faces of Influenza Campaign.
- For a list of asthma coalitions, programs and resources in Indiana, go to InJAC’s Resources page, or call the Indiana Family Helpline (855-435-7178). Additional information can be found by visiting the Asthma Community Network.

References