

Atrium Health Navicent Physicians Urge Flu Vaccination for Children As Flu and RSV Cases Strike Central Georgia Hard

Flu vaccination is recommended for everyone aged six months and older

MACON, Ga., Nov 16, 2022 – Atrium Health Navicent physicians are urging parents and guardians to consider vaccinating children aged six months and older against the flu as cases of the flu and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) cases are increasing in central Georgia.

Both flu and RSV are contagious respiratory diseases which can lead to severe illness and hospitalization, particularly in babies and older adults.

While no vaccine is available for RSV, a 2022 study showed flu vaccination reduces children's risk of severe, life-threatening illness by 75 percent. During 2019-2020, flu vaccination prevented an estimated 7.5 million influenza illnesses and 6,300 influenza-associated deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Despite the availability and benefits associated with flu vaccination, a very small proportion of our community’s children aged 16 and younger have received the vaccine this season,” said Dr. Mitch Rodriguez, medical director of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and business development officer for Atrium Health Navicent Beverly Knight Olson Children’s Hospital. “With the holiday season ahead, it’s important to note that it takes about two weeks before antibodies develop in the body and provide protection against the disease. If your child hasn’t yet been vaccinated, don’t delay.”

Although most otherwise healthy infants and young children infected with RSV do not require hospitalization, some require additional care. Each year, an estimated 58,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized in the United States due to RSV infection, according to the CDC.

While many children diagnosed with flu or RSV are able to recover after a trip to the pediatrician or an urgent care visit, children who exhibit the following symptoms should receive emergency care:

- Difficult, labored, shallow or rapid breathing
- Skin turning blue, especially on the lips and fingernails
- Unresponsiveness
- Fever over 100.4 in a baby younger than two months old
- Fever with rash
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen

The Pediatric Emergency Center at Atrium Health Navicent Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital, located at 888 Pine Street in Macon, is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For less severe symptoms, parents and guardians can seek care from their child’s pediatrician or one of Atrium Health Navicent’s three Macon urgent care facilities:

- Atrium Health Navicent Urgent Care North (3400 Riverside Drive, Macon)
- Atrium Health Navicent Urgent Care East (1339 Gray Highway, Macon)
- Atrium Health Navicent Urgent Care Northwest (5925 Zebulon Road, Macon)

“While the number of COVID-19 cases in our community has decreased, it’s important that we all continue to practice good hand hygiene, cover the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing, and stay home when we’re sick to reduce the spread of these viruses,” Rodriguez said.

To help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses this holiday season, follow these tips:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and help young children clean their hands. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep your hands away from your face: Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with those who are sick: Avoid kissing and sharing cups or eating utensils with people who have cold-like symptoms.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or upper shirt sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects such as toys, doorknobs and mobile devices.
- If possible, stay home from work, school and public areas when you’re sick.
- Get a flu vaccine. Vaccines are available from primary care physicians and pharmacies.

For more information about The Pediatric Emergency Center at Atrium Health Navicent Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital, children's services or for help finding a pediatrician, visit childrenshospitalnh.org.

About Atrium Health Navicent

Atrium Health Navicent is the leading provider of healthcare in central and south Georgia and is committed to its mission of elevating health and well-being through compassionate care. Atrium Health Navicent provides high-quality, personalized care in 53 specialties at more than 50 facilities throughout the region. As part of the largest, integrated, nonprofit health system in the Southeast, it is also able to tap into some of the nation's leading medical experts and specialists with Atrium Health, allowing it to provide the best care close to home – including advanced innovations in virtual medicine and care. Throughout its 125-year history in the community, Atrium Health Navicent has remained dedicated to enhancing health and wellness for individuals throughout the region through nationally recognized quality care, community health initiatives and collaborative partnerships. It is also one of the leading teaching hospitals in the region, helping to ensure viability for rural health care for the next generation. For more information, please visit www.NavicentHealth.org.

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