

Children with chronic lung diseases at higher risk of flu hospitalisation

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Not enough parents of children with chronic lung conditions are taking advantage of free vaccinations against influenza. Credit: Shutterstock

Flu vaccination is provided free for children with chronic illnesses, yet uptake is low prompting UNSW researchers to call for renewed efforts to get this message out to parents in order to keep affected children out of hospital.

Efforts to prevent [children](#) with chronic [lung](#) disease being hospitalised with [influenza](#) need to be stepped up following high rates of flu hospitalisation in these children.

This is one of the recommendations of a UNSW study that found children with underlying lung conditions such as asthma, [cystic fibrosis](#), bronchopulmonary dysplasia and other congenital chronic conditions are at least five times more at risk of being hospitalised with influenza than other children.

The study, which looked at a cohort of 11,058 children with [chronic lung diseases](#) residing in NSW, found that not only are children with chronic

lung disease substantially more at risk of hospitalisation from flu, but the average cost of these hospitalisations is almost four times more expensive.

The cost per episode of influenza-associated hospitalisation was \$19,704 for children with chronic lung diseases compared to \$4557 for children without.

In addition, 13 percent of children with chronic lung condition hospitalised with influenza required referral to another hospital for ongoing care compared to 7 percent without.

Study lead author Dr. Nusrat Homaira from UNSW's School of Women's and Children's Health says despite the fact that vaccination against influenza is free for children with chronic lung conditions, unpublished data suggests uptake is low and more needs to be done to encourage parents of children with the condition to take advantage of the service.

"Influenza is a vaccine preventable disease and Australian children with chronic lung disease are entitled to free [flu vaccination](#)," Dr. Homaira says.

"However the uptake – particularly in children with asthma – is reported to be very low. Our research suggests that current efforts to prevent flu in children with chronic lung conditions are either suboptimal or ineffective."

Dr. Homaira and her co-authors say an immediate first step is to conduct further research into the effectiveness of vaccine in these children and to look for ways to improve vaccine uptake.

"Vaccination against influenza is highly recommended for children with chronic lung conditions and the vaccine should be repeated every year for these children", Dr. Homaira says.

The research paper was published in the *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses* journal.

More information: Nusrat Homaira et al. Impact of influenza on hospitalization rates in children with a range of chronic lung diseases, *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/irv.12633](https://doi.org/10.1111/irv.12633)

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