

Families Fighting Flu Marks 20th Anniversary as CDC Meeting Begins

Founding families reflect on 20 years of advocating for flu vaccinations, education

ATLANTA, GA, UNITED STATES, October 23, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the October 2024 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) gets underway

later this week, the founding members of [Families Fighting Flu](#) (FFF) are reflecting on the organization's accomplishments and the work that continues to promote protection from the influenza virus.



In October 2004, Alissa Kantowitz one of FFF's original members attended the first of several ACIP meetings to share the stories of the loss of several children to the flu during the 2003-2004 flu season. United in their grief, the families were determined to change policies that did not include flu vaccinations for young children, with a focus on keeping other families from experiencing similar tragic losses unnecessarily.

"While it seems unreal that it has been 20 years, I can remember my first time at ACIP as if it were yesterday," said Kantowitz. "While we have deep pride in the policy changes we have helped to craft, we each know there is more work to do. Flu vaccination rates continue to remain far lower than they should."

Over the following years, Families Fighting Flu was instrumental in helping to lower the age requirement for who receives an annual flu shot. That work culminated in the 2010 ACIP recommendation for the universal flu vaccine recommendation for Americans aged 6 months and older. That recommendation remains in place to this day.

Despite this strong vaccine recommendation, raising the rates of flu vaccine administration remains a challenge. During the 2023-24 flu season, vaccinations for children aged 6 months through 17-year-old was just over 55%--a decrease of two percentage points from the previous season, and down by more than 8 percent pre-pandemic. Sadly, the CDC has reported more than 200 pediatric deaths during the 2023-24 flu season.

For Michele Stevenson of Michigan, those numbers are a sobering reminder of how the flu

almost took the life of her now 9-year-old son, Kaden. Kaden survived the flu but both of his legs had to be amputated as a result of the infection in his bloodstream that the flu caused.

"I had gotten my flu shot at work, but as a single mom, hadn't had a chance to get Kaden vaccinated, that is a regret I don't want any other parent to experience, said Michele. "I plead with parents, please don't put off getting your kids the flu shot."

The news is not much better for adults over the age of 18, where vaccine rates barely hit 45 percent, down two percentage points from the previous season.

"I was a healthy, active guy in my 30s when the flu nearly killed me," said Charlie Hinderlighter, a flu survivor from St. Louis. "I was in the hospital for nearly two months and had months of recovery following that. Anyone who thinks flu is 'no big deal' hasn't lived through what my wife and I experienced. Getting the flu shot should be everyone's priority at the start of the flu season each year." "We often say we started a club that we want no one else to have to join," said Gary Stein, FFF's Board Chair and founding family member. "However, in 20 years, the number of families who have needed our resources and became part of our extend family has continued to grow, and far too often that is a result of a lack of knowledge about how truly dangerous the flu can be. We are determined to change that by encouraging vaccination for all ages, to encourage people to get tested if they do become ill, and then, get the appropriate treatment for whatever respiratory disease they may have contracted. Doing so could save a life."

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About Families Fighting Flu:

Founded in 2004, Families Fighting Flu (FFF) is a national, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) advocacy organization dedicated to protecting children, families, and communities against the flu. Our organization includes families whose loved ones have suffered serious medical complications or died from influenza, as well as other advocates and healthcare professionals committed to flu education and prevention.

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