Understanding Egg Allergies and Flu Vaccines

It may be peak flu season, but it’s not too late to have your child vaccinated, even if he or she has an intolerance or allergy to eggs. Flu shots are recommended for everyone ages six months and older. Because the flu vaccine contains a very small amount of egg protein, you may need to take precautions if your child has an egg allergy, but not necessarily avoid the vaccine altogether.

**What is the difference between food intolerance and an allergy?**
Food allergies affect millions of children and adults, but sometimes food intolerance can be confused for a food allergy. Food intolerance means that the body can’t break down a certain food, which often results in an upset stomach or diarrhea. Food allergies can also cause stomach problems or hives. In addition, allergies can cause serious or life-threatening reactions, such as breathing or heart problems. Generally, food allergies are diagnosed by a physician based on testing and/or a history of your child’s reaction to a specific food.

**What if my child has an egg allergy?**
Research indicates that only about one percent of all children are allergic to eggs, and of those children, a very small number have a severe allergy.

Recent studies show that most people who are allergic to eggs can safely receive the flu vaccine under the care of a doctor. Those who normally have mild reactions to eggs, such as hives, can receive a normal vaccine without being skin tested for the vaccine first. After receiving the vaccine, your child should remain at the doctor’s office for a 30-minute observation period. Severe reactions may include breathing or heart problems. If your child has had a severe reaction to the vaccine or eggs, there are two options. The first is that he or she may receive the vaccine in two parts. The first shot would contain only 10 percent of the full dose. Once given, your child would be observed for 30 minutes to see if any allergic symptoms develop. If none develop, then the rest of the vaccine would be given, followed by another 30-minute observation period. The shots can be given by your child’s pediatrician or allergist. However this option may not work for everyone and desensitization may still be needed.

Desensitization occurs when the vaccine is given in smaller amounts, usually four or five doses. This procedure should only be done in an allergist’s office.

**Why is it important for my child to get a flu vaccine?**
The vaccine is the best way to protect against seasonal flu and potentially severe complications from the flu. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 12,000 children are hospitalized and 100 die every year due to seasonal flu or related complications. The shots are especially important for children who are younger than five and those who have long-term health conditions like asthma, diabetes and heart conditions because they are at higher risk for complications from the flu.