

Why vaccinate a healthy child against flu?

“Doctor, my child is healthy and has never had flu before. Does he really need the flu vaccine every year?”

A mother asked me this recently about her 5-year-old son.

We discussed the importance of timely vaccination and preventing complications. She was reassured and decided to vaccinate him.

But her question made me pause and think about the bigger picture.

How significant is the burden of influenza?

According to the WHO, seasonal influenza causes around 1 billion cases globally every year, including 3–5 million cases of severe illness and an estimated 290,000–650,000 respiratory deaths.

The burden on young children is significant too, with estimates of more than 100 million episodes of illness and around 870,000 hospitalisations for acute respiratory infections among children under 5 every year.

Children also play an important role in transmitting influenza within families and the wider community.

A recent study published in *Pediatrics* involving nearly 16,000 children found that influenza vaccination reduced influenza-associated emergency visits or hospitalisations by an estimated 53% in children without underlying conditions.

So when a parent asks, “But my child is healthy — why vaccinate?”

Perhaps the answer is bigger than protecting just that one child.

It is about reducing severe illness, hospitalisations and transmission — and helping protect those around us who may be more vulnerable. Sometimes, understanding the burden of disease helps us understand the value of prevention.

And it is encouraging to see influenza vaccination campaign being expanded to school students and teachers in the UAE.

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