

Influenza (Flu) Information for Parents

What is influenza (flu)

Flu is a contagious respiratory disease. It is not the same as the “stomach flu.” Flu is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death.

What are the symptoms?

Flu symptoms include fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, and body aches. Some children may also have vomiting and diarrhea. Not everyone with flu will have a fever or experience all of these symptoms. These symptoms usually begin suddenly and might be severe enough to stop your daily activities.

Should my child get a flu vaccination?

Yes. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get flu vaccine every year. Getting a flu vaccine helps protect your child from getting the flu or getting very sick with the flu that could cause your child to be hospitalized, or even die. It also can prevent them from passing it to people who can get very sick from flu – like babies, elderly people, and people who have chronic diseases.

Are children at high risk for complications of flu?

Sometimes healthy people, including children, can have serious complications or die from the flu. Children at risk for serious complications include:

- Children age 6 months to 5 years, but especially those under 2 years.
- Children and teens 5-18 years with:
 - Heart disease.

- Asthma or other pulmonary disease.
- Metabolic disease (including diabetes).
- Immune deficiency.
- Blood disorders.
- Long-term aspirin therapy.
- Teens who are pregnant during flu season.

Should my child get one or two doses of flu vaccine?

It depends on your child’s age and whether they got flu vaccine in the past. If your child is 6 months through 8 years old, he or she may need two doses at least four weeks apart. Ask your health care provider.

When should my family get vaccinated?

For best protection, flu vaccine is recommended in September or October before flu season starts. But you can get it anytime during flu season which is typically October through April.

How is flu different from a cold?

Colds are generally less serious than the flu. With a cold, you may have a runny or stuffy nose, while the flu causes body aches, fever, and extreme tiredness. A cold won't usually keep kids from their normal activities, but kids with the flu will often feel too sick to play. Flu can cause serious health problems like pneumonia, bacterial infections, and hospitalization.

What type of flu vaccine should my child get?

There are now several types of flu vaccine available. Your health care provider will know what type of vaccine is best for your child. The most important thing is to get them vaccinated.

Flu vaccine and allergies

Children with an egg allergy can safely get a flu vaccine. Life-threatening allergic reactions to flu vaccine are very rare. Talk to your health care provider if your child had a life-threatening reaction to a flu vaccine.

What if my child has the flu?

- Stay home if you or your child is sick.
- Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Children may need fever reducing medications to keep their fever under control. Follow your doctor's instructions.
- Antibiotics will not help a person recover from the flu. Flu is caused by a virus not by bacteria.
- Seek immediate medical care if your child:
 - Breathes rapidly or with difficulty.
 - Has bluish skin color.
 - Does not drink enough and becomes dehydrated.
 - Does not wake up or interact with others.
 - Is so irritable that he or she doesn't want to be held.
 - Gets better only to become sick again, with fever and a more severe cough.
- If you are concerned that something does not seem right with your child, call your doctor or clinic.

What can I do to protect myself and others?

- Get vaccinated.
- Avoid being around others who are sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Protect infants by not exposing them to large crowds or sick family members when flu is in your community.
- Do not share drinking cups and straws.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets).

What about antiviral medicines?

Antiviral medicines can offer some protection if you have been exposed to flu. Contact your health care provider right away if your child gets sick with the flu and is at high-risk for complications from flu.

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