



The Flu:

A Guide for Parents

FLU INFORMATION

What is the flu?

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. Flu viruses cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year.

The flu can be very dangerous for children. Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.

How serious is the flu?

Flu illness can vary from mild to severe. While the flu can be serious even in people who are otherwise healthy, it can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age who have certain long-term health conditions, including asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine

disorders (such as diabetes), kidney, liver, and metabolic disorders, and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication. Children with these conditions and children who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy can have severe illness from the flu.

How does the flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching something that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults). Some people with the flu will not have a fever.

How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People with the flu may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can infect others for longer periods of time, especially if they still have symptoms.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD

How can I protect my child against the flu?

To protect against the flu, the first and most important thing you can do is to get a flu vaccine for yourself and your child.

- ▶ Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.
- ▶ It's especially important that young children and children with long-term health conditions get vaccinated. (See list of conditions in "How serious is the flu?")
- ▶ Caregivers of children with health conditions or of children younger than 6 months old should get vaccinated. (Babies younger than 6 months are too young to be vaccinated themselves.)
- ▶ Another way to protect babies is to vaccinate pregnant women. Research shows that flu vaccination gives some protection to the baby both while the woman is pregnant and for several months after the baby is born.

Flu vaccine is updated annually to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the upcoming flu season. Flu vaccines are made using strict safety and production measures. Over the years, millions of flu vaccines have been given in the United States with a very good safety record.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

Is there a medicine to treat the flu?

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that can be used to treat influenza illness. They can make people feel better and get better sooner. Antivirals can mean the difference between having milder illness instead of very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay. Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics, which fight against bacterial infections. They work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. It's very important that antiviral drugs are used early to treat the flu in people who are very sick (for example, people who are in the hospital) or who are at high risk of serious flu complications. Other people with flu illness may also benefit from taking antiviral drugs. These drugs can be given to children and pregnant women.

What are some of the other ways I can protect my child against the flu?

In addition to getting vaccinated, you and your children can take everyday steps to help prevent the spread of germs:

These include the following:

- ▶ Stay away from people who are sick.
- ▶ If your child is sick with flu illness, try to keep him or her in a separate room from others in the household, if possible.
- ▶ CDC recommends that your sick child stay home for at least 24 hours after his or her fever is gone, except to get medical care or for other necessities. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- ▶ Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after it has been used.
- ▶ Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- ▶ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- ▶ Clean and disinfect hard surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs, including bathroom surfaces, kitchen counters and toys for children. Clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.



These everyday steps are a good way to reduce your chances of getting sick. However, a yearly flu vaccine is the best protection against flu illness.

IF YOUR CHILD IS SICK

What can I do if my child gets sick?

Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child's illness.

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids. If your child is 5 years and older and does not have other health problems and gets flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed.

Children younger than 5 years of age – especially those younger than 2 years old – and children with certain chronic conditions, including asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system, are at high risk of serious flu-related complications. If your child is at high risk for flu complications, call your doctor or take them to the doctor right away if they develop flu symptoms.

What if my child seems very sick?

Even previously healthy children can get very sick from the flu.

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids. If your child is 5 years or older and does not have other health problems and gets flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed:

- ▶ Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- ▶ Bluish or gray skin color
- ▶ Not drinking enough fluids (not going to the bathroom or not making as much urine as they normally do)
- ▶ Severe or persistent vomiting
- ▶ Not waking up or not interacting
- ▶ Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- ▶ Flu symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough
- ▶ Has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough.

Can my child go to school, day care or camp if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children or caregivers.

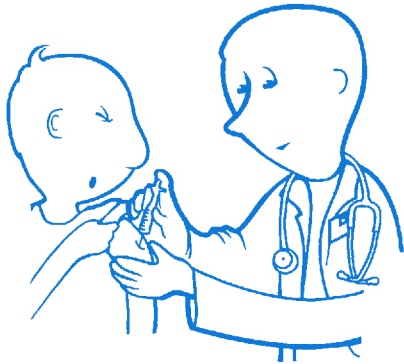
When can my child go back to school after having the flu?

Keep your child home from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. (The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) A fever is defined as 100°F (37.8°C) or higher.

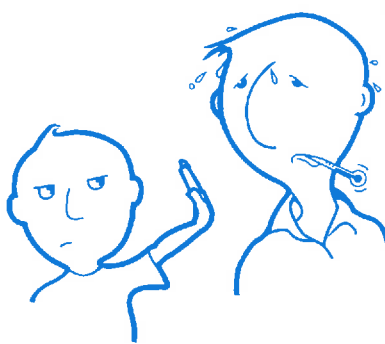
For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu or call 800-CDC-INFO

Advice for Parents on Talking to Children About the Flu

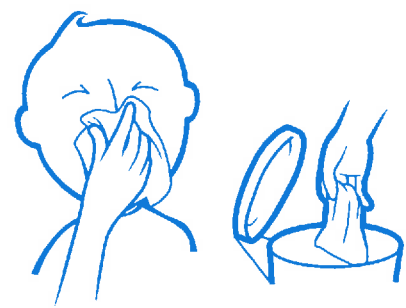
Focus on what your child can do to fight the flu and to not spread flu to others:



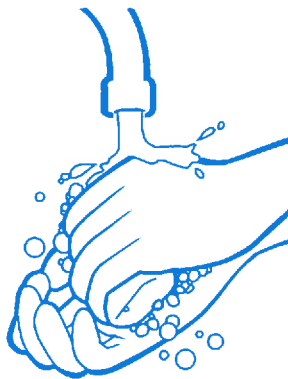
Have your child get a flu vaccine. The flu shot may pinch, but it will help protect them from getting sick later. A flu vaccine given as a nasal spray may also be available.



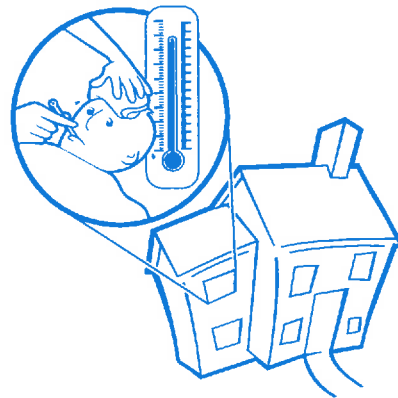
Encourage them to try to stay away from people who are sick.



Encourage them to cough and sneeze into a tissue when they are sick. Throw the tissue in the trash right away. If they do not have a tissue, they should cover their mouth and nose with their arm.



Encourage them to wash hands often with soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds. Set a good example by doing this yourself.



Encourage them to stay home from work and school if they are sick, and stay away from people until they are better.

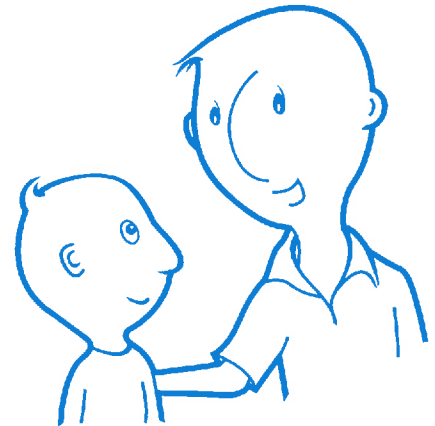


INFLUENZA (FLU) Talking to Children About Flu

Encourage healthy habits: eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep, and getting exercise.



Use their questions as a chance to tell them how to avoid the flu and how to not spread flu and other germs.



For more information call CDC info at 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) or go to www.cdc.gov/flu.

Learn the Facts About Flu Vaccine!

Is the flu vaccine safe?

- The flu vaccine has been around for more than 50 years
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) routinely monitor the safety of all vaccines, including flu
- New vaccines go through years of research and three phases of clinical trials before they can be deemed safe and effective by the FDA and made available to the general public

Is the flu vaccine effective?

- The flu vaccine was found to prevent death in otherwise healthy children by as much as 65%¹
- When well-matched with circulating strains, the flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness by up to 60%²

What are common side effects of the vaccine?

- Common side effects can include soreness, redness, and/or swelling at the injection site; fever; headache; and/or muscle aches
- Common side effects are evidence that your body is having an immune response, which is what it's supposed to do!

Can the flu vaccine cause the flu?

- NO! The vaccine contains an inactivated virus or no flu virus at all, so it's impossible for it to give you the flu

How does the flu vaccine work?

- It causes your body to produce antibodies (infection-fighting cells) that enable it to fight the virus and prevent infection following exposure
- It takes two weeks after vaccination for your body to build up protection against the flu
- Even those who are healthy can get very sick from the flu or spread it to others

Why do you need a flu vaccine every year?

- Flu strains can change from year-to-year
- Protection gained from last year's vaccine can decrease over time, even if circulating flu strains haven't changed

Who needs to be vaccinated?

- CDC recommends everyone six months and older get vaccinated annually

When is an ideal time for flu vaccination?

- CDC recommends everyone receive their annual flu vaccine by the end of October



¹Source: Flannery et al., 2016. Influenza vaccine effectiveness against pediatric deaths: 2010 – 2014. Pediatrics Volume 139, number 5, May 2017:e20164244.

²Source: CDC. 2017. Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Effectiveness, 2005 – 2017. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/effectiveness-studies.htm>.