

The Flu: A Guide for Parents

What is the flu?

The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs that is caused by the influenza virus. The flu can spread from person to person. Most people with flu are sick for about a week, but then feel better. However, some people (especially young children, pregnant women, older people and people with chronic health problems) can get very sick and some can die.



What are the symptoms of the flu?

Most people with the flu feel tired and have a fever, headache, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and sore muscles. Some people, especially children, may also have stomach problems and diarrhea. The cough can last two or more weeks.



How does the flu spread?

People who have the flu usually cough, sneeze and have a runny nose; this creates droplets with the virus in them. Other people can get the flu by breathing in these droplets or getting them in their nose or mouth. In most people, the flu can be spread from one day before getting sick to up to five to seven days after getting sick. This can be longer in children and in people with weakened immune systems.

How can I protect my child from the flu?

A flu vaccine is the best way to protect against the flu, therefore, it is very important to make sure your child receives the influenza vaccine. You can protect your child by getting a flu vaccine for yourself too. Also, encourage your child's close contacts to get a flu vaccine. This is very important if your child is younger than five or has a chronic health problem like asthma or diabetes.

Who should get vaccinated?

Everyone! On Feb. 24, 2010, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted that everyone six months of age and older should get a flu vaccine each year starting with the 2010-11 influenza season. While everyone should get a flu vaccine each flu season, it's especially important that certain people get vaccinated either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for people at high risk for developing flu-related complications.

What kind of flu vaccine should my child get?

Most children ages 2 to 18 years should receive at least one dose of either the nasal spray or the flu shot. However, all children ages 6 to 23 months, and those ages 2 to 4 years who have had

asthma or wheezing within the past year, or who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza complications, should receive the flu shot. Also, if your child is between 6 months and 8 years of age, they may need to receive two doses of flu vaccine during the 2010-11 flu season. Talk with your healthcare provider about what vaccine your child should get and how many doses he or she needs.

When and how often should my child and I get vaccinated?

Because flu viruses change every year, the vaccine is updated annually. So even if you or your children had a flu vaccination last year, you both still need to get immunized this season to be protected. It is never too late to get vaccinated. So if October or November slip by, and you haven't gotten your children or yourself vaccinated, you should get vaccinated in December or even later.

Is there medicine to treat the flu?

There are antiviral drugs for children one year and older that can make your child feel better, be less contagious and get better sooner. These drugs need to be approved by a doctor and should be started during the first two days that your child is sick for them to work. Your doctor can discuss with you if these drugs are right for your child.

How else can I protect my child against flu?

Take time to get a flu vaccine and get your child vaccinated too. You and your child should also take everyday steps to prevent the spread of germs; this includes:

- Clean hands often
- Stay away from people who are sick
- Keep hands away from face
- Cover coughs and sneezes (it's best to use a tissue, then throw it away).



What should I use for hand cleaning?

Washing hands with soap and water (for as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice) will help protect your child from germs. When soap and water are not available, alcohol wipes or gels can be used (the gels should be rubbed into your hands until they are dry).

Can my child go to school if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid spreading the flu.

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

Keep your child home from school until his or her temperature has been normal for 24 hours. Remind your child to cover his/her mouth when coughing or sneezing, to protect others.

For more information about the flu, visit www.cdc.gov/flu