



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. They 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 more 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. 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 by shedding virus from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and might be still contagious past 5 to 7 days of being sick, 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 under "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 because research shows that this gives some protection to the baby both while the woman is pregnant and for a few months after the baby is born.

A new flu vaccine is made each year to protect against the three flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the next 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 can treat flu illness. They can make people feel better and get better sooner and may prevent serious flu complications, like pneumonia, for example, that can lead to hospitalization and even death. These drugs are different from antibiotics, but they also need to be prescribed by a doctor. They work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. It's very important that antiviral drugs be used early to treat the flu in people who are very sick (for example people who are in the hospital) or people who are at greater risk of having 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, take – and encourage your child to take – everyday steps that can help prevent the spread of germs.

This includes:

- ▶ Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- ▶ Stay away from people who are sick.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ If someone in the household is sick, try to keep the sick person in a separate room from others in the household, if possible.
- ▶ Keep surfaces like bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- ▶ Throw tissues and other disposable items used by sick persons in your household in the trash.

These everyday steps are a good way to reduce your chances of getting all sorts of illnesses, but a yearly flu vaccine is always the best way to specifically prevent the flu.



What should I use for hand washing?

Washing hands with soap and water (for as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice) will help protect against many germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

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.

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

If your child is younger than 5 years (and especially younger than 2 years) or of any age with a long term health condition (like asthma, a neurological condition, or diabetes, for example) and develops flu-like symptoms, they are at risk for serious complications from the flu. Ask a doctor if your child should be examined.

What if my child seems very sick?

Even children who have always been healthy before or had the flu before can get very sick from the flu.

Call for emergency care or take your child to a doctor right away if your child of any age has any of the warning or emergency signs below:

- ▶ Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- ▶ Bluish or gray skin color
- ▶ Not drinking enough fluids (not going to the bathroom or 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-like 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. (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 www.flu.gov or call 800-CDC-INFO

Action Steps for Parents if Children are Sick and Must Stay Home

- ▶ Have activities for your children to do while at home. Pull together games, books, DVDs and other items to keep your family entertained.
- ▶ Find out if your employer will allow you to stay at home to care for sick household members or children dismissed from school. Ask if you can work from home. If this is not possible, find other ways to care for your children at home.

Tips for taking care of children (and other household members) with the flu

- ▶ **Stay home if you or your child is sick** until at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine). Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their viruses to themselves rather than sharing them with others. Stay home even if taking antiviral medicines.
- ▶ **Cover coughs and sneezes. Clean hands** with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often and especially after coughing or sneezing.
- ▶ **Keep sick household members in a separate room** (a sick room) in the house as much as possible to limit contact with household members who are not sick. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for the sick person.
- ▶ **Monitor the health of the sick child and any other household members** by checking for fever and other symptoms of flu. A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). If you are not able to measure a temperature, the sick person might have a fever if he or she feels warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering.

Watch for emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention. These warning signs include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
 - Bluish or gray skin color
 - Not drinking enough fluids
 - Not urinating or no tears when crying
 - Severe or persistent vomiting
 - Not waking up or not interacting
 - Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Sudden dizziness
 - Confusion
 - Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- ▶ **Check with your doctor about any special care** needed for household members who may be at higher risk for complications from flu. This includes children under the age of five (5) years, pregnant women, people of any age who have chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), and people age 65 years and older.
 - ▶ **Have the sick household member wear a facemask** – if available and tolerable – when sharing common spaces with other household members to help prevent spreading the virus to others. This is especially important if other household members are at high risk for complications from flu.
 - ▶ **Ask your doctor about antiviral medicines or fever-reducing medicines** for sick household members. Do not give aspirin to children or teenagers; it can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome
 - ▶ **Make sure sick household members get plenty of rest and drink clear fluids** (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from being dehydrated.

For more information:

- ▶ Visit: www.flu.gov
- ▶ Contact CDC 24 Hours/Every Day
 - 1 (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636)
 - TTY: (888) 232-6348
 - cdcinfo@cdc.gov

Action Steps for Parents of Children at High Risk for Flu Complications

Children with chronic health problems such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, metabolic conditions, neurological and neuromuscular disorders, or who are pregnant are at higher risk of having complications from flu. In addition, all children younger than five (5) years old are at higher risk of flu complications compared to older children. If you are not sure if any of your children are at higher risk for flu complications, please check with a doctor.

Keep children at high risk for flu complications from getting sick with the flu

- ▶ **Make sure your child's hands are washed** for 20 seconds with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often and especially after coughing or sneezing.
- ▶ Have your child **cough and sneeze into a tissue** or into his or her elbow or shoulder if a tissue is not available.
- ▶ **Keep your child away from people who are sick.**
- ▶ **Clean surfaces and objects that your child frequently touches** with cleaning agents that are usually used.
- ▶ When there is flu in your community, consider your child's risk of exposure if they attend public gatherings. In communities with a lot of flu, **people who are at risk of complications from flu should consider staying away from public gatherings.**
- ▶ If flu is severe in your community, talk to your doctor and child's school to **develop a plan on how to handle your child's special needs.**
- ▶ **Get your child vaccinated** for seasonal flu when vaccines are available.

Recognize if your children are sick

Some children may not be able to tell you about their symptoms, which can result in a delay in responding to their illness. It is important to watch carefully for the signs and symptoms of flu or unusual behavior that may be a sign your child is sick. Symptoms of flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, and fatigue. A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). If you are not able to measure a temperature, your child might have a fever if he or she feels warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering.

Watch for emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention. These warning signs include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not urinating or no tears when crying
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Please share this information with other caregivers for your child so they can tell you if they notice your child is not feeling well.

Tips for taking care of high risk children with the flu

- ▶ **Contact your doctor immediately if your child is sick.** This is important because the antiviral medicines used to treat flu work best when started within the first two (2) days of getting sick. Your doctor will tell you what special care is needed for your child.
- ▶ **Keep your sick child at home** until at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine). Keep your child home unless they need to go to the doctor.
- ▶ **Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks clear fluids** (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants [Pedialyte®]) to keep from being dehydrated.
- ▶ **If your child has a fever, use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor** recommends based on your child's age. Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) **should not** be given to children or teenagers who have flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- ▶ **Keep your sick child in a separate room** (a sick room) in the house as much as possible to limit contact with household members who are not sick. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for the sick child.

For more information:

- ▶ **Visit:** www.flu.gov
- ▶ **Contact CDC 24 Hours/Every Day**
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 - TTY: (888) 232-6348
 - cdcinfo@cdc.gov

Action Steps for Parents to Protect Your Child and Family from the Flu this School Year

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following three action steps to keep you and your family from getting sick with the flu at school and at home:

- **Take time to get a flu vaccine.** The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine as soon as the annual vaccines are available.
- **Take everyday preventative actions to stop the spread of germs** by washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing; covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze; avoid close contact with sick people or, if you are sick, limit your contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- **Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.** Early use of antiviral drugs (within the first two days of symptoms) can make the illness milder and shorten the time you are sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

If flu conditions become MORE severe, parents should consider the following steps:

- ▶ **Extend the time sick children stay home** for at least seven (7) days, even if they feel better sooner. People who are still sick after 7 days should continue to stay home until at least 24 hours *after* symptoms have completely gone away.
- ▶ **If a household member is sick, keep any school-aged brothers or sisters home for five (5) days** from the time the household member became sick. Parents should monitor their health and the health of other school-aged children for fever and other symptoms of the flu.

Follow these steps to prepare for the flu:

- ▶ Plan for child care at home if your child gets sick or their school is dismissed.
- ▶ Plan to monitor the health of the sick child and any other children in the household by checking for fever and other symptoms of flu.
- ▶ Identify if you have children who are at higher risk of serious disease from the flu and talk to your healthcare provider about a plan to protect them during the flu season. Children at high risk of serious disease from the flu include: children under 5 years of age and those children with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma and diabetes.
- ▶ Identify a separate room in the house for the care of sick family members.
- ▶ Update emergency contact lists.
- ▶ Collect games, books, DVDs and other items to keep your family entertained if schools are dismissed or your child is sick and must stay home.

For more information:

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- ▶ **Contact CDC 24 Hours/Every Day**
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 - cdcinfo@cdc.gov

Flu is a **serious contagious** disease that can lead to **hospitalization** and even **death**.

Flu-like symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue

Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

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

Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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CDC Says
“Take 3”
Actions
To Fight The Flu



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

CDC urges you to take the following actions to protect yourself and others from influenza (the flu):

#1 Take time to get a flu vaccine.

- CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.
- While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine protects against the three viruses that research suggests will be most common.
- The 2011–2012 flu vaccine will protect against an influenza A H3N2 virus, an influenza B virus and the H1N1 virus that emerged in 2009 to cause a pandemic.
- Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine as soon as the 2011–2012 vaccines are available.
- Vaccination of high risk persons is especially important to decrease their risk of severe flu illness.
- People at high risk of serious flu complications include young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease and people 65 years and older.
- Vaccination also is important for health care workers, and other people who live with or care for high risk people to keep from spreading flu to high risk people.
- Children younger than 6 months are at high risk of serious flu illness, but are too young to be vaccinated. People who care for them should be vaccinated instead.



#2 Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.



#3 Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.

- If you get the flu, antiviral drugs can treat your illness.
- Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics. They are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) and are not available over-the-counter.
- Antiviral drugs can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
- It's very important that antiviral drugs be used early (within the first 2 days of symptoms) to treat people who are very sick (such as those who are hospitalized) or people who are sick with flu symptoms and who are at increased risk of severe flu illness, such as pregnant women, young children, people 65 and older and people with certain chronic health conditions.
- Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

