

Flu (Influenza)

What is the flu?

The flu is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi that occurs every winter. Major epidemics every 3 or 4 years (for example, Asian influenza). The main symptoms are a stuffy nose, sore throat, and nagging cough. There may be more muscle pain, headache, fever, and chills than colds usually cause.

For most people, influenza is just a "bad" cold and bed rest is not necessary. Flu is not dangerous to people who are otherwise healthy.

How can I take care of my child?

The treatment of flu depends on a child's main symptoms and is no different from the treatment for other viral respiratory infections. Bed rest is not necessary.

- **Fever or aches**

Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) every 6 hours or ibuprofen (Advil) every 8 hours for fever over 102°F (39°C). Children and adolescents who may have influenza should never take aspirin because it may cause Reye's syndrome.

- **Cough or hoarseness**

For children over age 4 give cough drops. If your child is 1 to 4 years old, give corn syrup (1/2 to 1 teaspoon as needed).

- **Sore throat**

Use hard candy for children over 4 years old. Warm chicken broth may also help children over 1 year old.

- **Stuffy nose**

Warm-water or saline nosedrops and suction (or nose blowing) will open most blocked noses. Use nasal washes at least four times a day or whenever your child can't breathe through the nose. Saline nosedrops are made by adding 1/2 teaspoon of salt to 1 cup of warm water.

- **Contagiousness**

Influenza spreads rapidly because the incubation period is only 24 to 36 hours and the virus is very contagious.

Your child may return to day care or school after the fever is gone and he feels up to it.

Does my child need antiviral medicine?

Most health care providers do not use antiviral medicines because they only reduce the time that your child is sick by a day or so. Usually the runny nose lasts 7 to 14 days and the cough lasts 2 to 3 weeks. All antiviral medicines must be given within 48 hours of the start of influenza symptoms to have an effect. Antiviral medicine is usually only used to treat children at high-risk for complications from the flu. Talk with your health care provider about this.

Does my child need a flu shot?

Yearly flu shots have always been recommended for high-risk children over 6 months of age. These children often have complications from influenza, such as pneumonia. Parents and

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siblings of high-risk children should also get a flu shot. Children are considered high-risk if they have the following conditions:

- Lung disease, such as asthma
- Heart disease, such as a congenital heart disease
- Muscle disease, such as muscular dystrophy
- Metabolic disease, such as diabetes
- Renal disease, such as nephrotic syndrome
- Cancer or immune system conditions
- Diseases requiring long-term aspirin therapy.

In 2006, the American Academy of Pediatrics added all children age 6 months to 5 years to the list of people who should get a flu shot. Recent research has shown that healthy children younger than 24 months are at as great a risk of complications as children with the high-risk conditions listed above.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child is having trouble breathing.
- Your child starts to act very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- Your child develops any complications such as an earache, sinus pain or pressure, or a fever lasting over 3 days.
- You have other questions or concerns.

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