

Let's Talk About...

The Flu (Influenza) and Flu Vaccination

The word flu is short for **influenza** (in-floo-ENza). The flu is caused by a virus that often appears in winter and early spring.

The flu virus causes fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, dizziness, appetite loss, and tiredness. It can also cause a runny nose, sore throat, and nausea. People sometimes confuse the flu with a cold. It can also be confused with other illnesses that make you sick to your stomach, have diarrhea, or feel achy. The real flu, though, is a severe respiratory infection that spreads easily from person to person. It happens quickly and affects the nose, throat, and lungs. A person exposed to the virus will usually become sick in 1–3 days.

The stomach flu is not the flu at all; it is caused by other viruses.

How do I prevent my child from getting the flu?

The flu spreads easily by direct contact with mucus from an infected person. Breathing in droplets someone has coughed or sneezed into the air also spreads the flu. There are two main ways to prevent

the flu: limiting exposure to the virus and getting the flu vaccine.

Here are a few ways children can prevent spreading or being exposed to the virus:

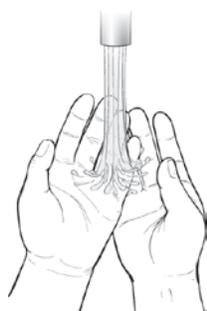
- Cover their mouths and noses when they cough or sneeze.
- Use tissues to clean their noses.
- Washing their hands after coughing, sneezing, or cleaning their noses.

Set a good example by doing these things yourself. Keep children who have the flu away from elderly people and anyone with a chronic (long-lasting) illness. You should also follow these guidelines:

- Stay away from crowded places, such as movie theaters, malls, and nurseries during a flu epidemic.
- Wash dishes in hot, soapy water to kill viruses.
- Wash your hands often and well. Apply soap to wet hands and scrub hands vigorously for 10–15 seconds before rinsing (see figure 1 and 2).

Hand washing with soap and water

Figure 1



Wet hands with warm, running water.



Apply liquid soap or use a clean bar of soap. Lather well.



Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15–20 seconds. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers.



Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.



Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Hand washing with a hand-rub product

Figure 2

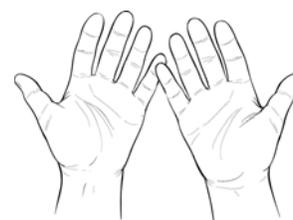


Use a product that contains at least 60% alcohol. Apply product to the palm of your hand. Read the product label to see how much to apply.



Be sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers.

Rub your hands together until they are dry.



Why should my child get vaccinated?

The simplest way to prevent the flu is with a vaccine. This can reduce the chance of getting the flu by 60% to 80%. Talk to your doctor about starting yearly flu vaccines.

Who should get a flu vaccine?

- 1 Anyone who wants to reduce the risk of getting the flu should consider getting the vaccine.
- 2 Children who are 6 months or older should receive the vaccine. They have a greater risk of being admitted to the hospital from the flu.
- 3 Children at high risk for flu complications should get the vaccine. This includes children who have the following:
 - Lung diseases or lung problems such as asthma or cystic fibrosis
 - Heart disease
 - Cancer or lowered immune systems from medication
 - Sickle cell anemia or other blood diseases
 - Diabetes, kidney problems, central nervous system disease, arthritis, or who use aspirin long term
- 4 Anyone caring for or living with newborns, babies or children who have the illnesses listed above should get the flu vaccination.

Why should my child have the vaccine each year?

There are many strains (types) of the flu virus that change over time. Each year, scientists figure out which strains of the virus are most likely to reach the United States. The vaccine companies then make a new vaccine to fight those strains of the virus. The vaccine is available each fall.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

The flu vaccine is safe for almost everyone. It is rare for those who get the vaccine to have muscle aches, fever and other flu-like symptoms 6–12 hours afterward. Children who are allergic to eggs should take precautions, because eggs are used to make the vaccine. If your child is allergic to eggs, having a skin test before getting the vaccine will make sure it is safe.

The vaccine is only recommended for children older than 6 months. If you have an infant younger than 6 months old, the rest of your family should get flu vaccines. The flu vaccine is safe for pregnant women and is recommended to protect your newborn.

When should my child receive the flu vaccine?

The best time to get the vaccine is in October before flu season starts. The next best time is in November. If that is not possible, getting a flu vaccine at any time during flu season will still help, even into the spring season. Children younger than 9 years old getting the vaccine for the first time need two doses, one month apart.

What happens when a person gets the flu?

Children with the flu usually have a sudden onset of chills, fevers, headaches, body aches, sore throats, and dry coughs. They can have high fevers. They may also vomit or have diarrhea. Your child will likely be irritable and have a poor appetite.

The worst of the illness lasts for 3–4 days. However, children may cough and feel tired for a week or more. Not all cases of the flu are severe. Even in the same family, one child may be very sick and another child may have a milder illness. Children may go back to school or day care when their temperature is normal

and they feel better. A lingering cough is not always a reason to remain at home.

How do you treat the flu?

Antiviral (ant-eye-VIE-ral) drugs that fight the flu are available. Your doctor can make sure your child has the flu by testing mucus from your child's nose. The medicine works best if given on the first day your child is sick.

Resting in bed is also best for children with the flu; it helps the body fight the virus. Give your child a non-aspirin medicine to relieve aches and pains and to reduce fever. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®, Panadol®, and Liqueprin®) is safe for your child.

Never give your child aspirin. It is linked to a serious liver and brain disease called Reye's syndrome. This can happen when a child with the flu or chicken pox takes aspirin at the same time.

Mist from a humidifier or vaporizer may help the cough. It is best not to give strong cough medicines. These can keep your child from bringing up mucus in the chest. Your doctor may recommend a medicine, however, if your child continues to have a dry cough. Antibiotics are not needed for most children who have the flu. They will be used only if your child develops a complication, such as an infection.

The flu often lessens a child's appetite. Don't expect your child to eat much for the first few days. It is important to have your child drink fluids, especially if they have a fever. Any juice or soft drink your child likes is okay. Encourage, but don't force, your child to drink fluids.

Active play can make a cough worse. Quiet activities are best during the first few days of the illness.

Some children who have long-term illnesses such as asthma, cancer, or diabetes may become sicker with the flu. They may need to go to the hospital or see their doctors.

Call your doctor immediately if...

Your child has any of the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- A bluish color to the lips
- Vomiting that continues for several hours

- Severe lack of energy
- Severe muscle aches
- Much less urine than usual

Call during regular office hours if your child:

- Complains of an earache or pulls at ears (as an infant)
- Becomes more cranky or keeps waking up at night
- Has a deep cough with lots of mucus
- Has a fever greater than 100°F (37.8°C) that lasts more than four days

What happens if my child is admitted to the hospital?

If admitted to the hospital, your child may need an IV (small tube that goes into the vein) to get enough liquids. Your child may also need oxygen, usually with a nasal cannula (a small tube that sits under your child's nose that blows a little oxygen into each nostril). Secretions may need to be sucked out of your child's nose. This is done with a small tube (catheter) put into the nose every once in a while. This clears out secretions and can help your child breathe better.

Why is my child in droplet precautions?

Healthcare workers have close contact with your child and can be exposed to the virus. They will wear a mask, gloves and gown when they come in your child's room. Your child will be in droplet precautions while in the hospital, and this could last at least seven days. Most children start to feel better sooner and can go home. They need to wear masks or have lightweight covers placed over the car seat or stroller seat when pushed through the halls to your car.

When can my child go home?

Children can go home once they:

- Drink enough liquids
- Are breathing safely
- Can be suctioned, if needed, on an out-patient basis
- Meet other doctor requirements

Where can I get a flu vaccine?

Adults and children 12 and older can get flu vaccines from Primary Children's Hospital outpatient pharmacy. You can also get a flu vaccine from your pediatrician, family physician, or local health department.

What if I have more questions?

If you have more questions about flu or the flu vaccine, contact your child's healthcare provider.

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