

# Flu (Influenza)

## What is the flu?

The flu is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi. The main symptoms are a runny nose, sore throat, and nagging cough. Usually there's more muscle pain, headache, fever, and chills than seen with colds.

## What causes the flu?

Flu is caused by influenza viruses. Flu viruses change yearly, which is why people can get the flu every year. The virus is spread by sneezing, coughing, and hand contact. It spreads rapidly because the incubation period is only 24 to 36 hours and the virus is very contagious.

## 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 discomfort or 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 6 give cough drops. If your child is over 2 years of age, give honey (1/2 to 1 teaspoon as needed). Never give honey to babies. If honey is not available, you can use corn syrup.

- **Sore throat**

Use hard candy for children over 6 years old. Warm chicken broth may also help children over 1 year old.

- **Stuffy or blocked nose**

Warm-water or saline nose drops 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. You can buy saline spray without a prescription. Recommended: Simply Saline comes in a pressurized canister and sprays with a very fine mist that does not "drown" your child with a large water droplet.

## **How long will the flu last?**

The fever lasts 2 to 3 days, the runny or stuffy nose 1 to 2 weeks, and the cough 2 to 3 weeks.

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

## **Who are high-risk children?**

Children are considered high-risk for complications 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
- Sickle cell disease
- Renal disease, such as nephrotic syndrome
- Cancer or immune system conditions
- Diseases requiring long-term aspirin therapy
- Pregnant teens
- Age less than 2 years

## **Does my child need antiviral medicine?**

Antiviral medicines must be started within 48 hours of the start of influenza symptoms to have any effect. They only reduce the time your child is sick by 1 or 2 days. They do not cure the disease nor remove all the symptoms.

## **Does my child need a flu shot?**

Yearly flu shots are the best way to prevent the spread of influenza and are recommended for all high-risk children over 6 months of age. These children often have complications from influenza, such as pneumonia. Parents and siblings of high-risk children should also get a flu shot.

In 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics added all healthy children age 6 months to 18 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.

The nasal spray flu vaccine (FluMist) may be given to healthy children over the age of 2 years old.

## **When should I call my child's healthcare 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.

A B.D. Schmitt protocol.