

Influenza (flu)

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

What is influenza (flu)?

Flu is a viral illness. It is very infectious (catchy). Outbreaks of flu usually occur during the winter months. There are different strains of the flu, but the symptoms and care are basically the same.

To help stop the spread of flu:

- Have all family members clean their hands often.
- Throw away used tissues right away.
- Do not share plates, cups or utensils.
- Cover your mouth or nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough. Or, cough into your arm/elbow.
- Avoid contact with others. This includes staying home from daycare and school.
 - Your child may return to daycare and school 24 hours after fever is gone **without** using fever-reducing medicines.
 - When coming for medical care, you and your ill child may need to wear a mask in common areas of your doctor's office, care center or hospital to help prevent the spread of the flu.

What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- Fever
- Body aches and headaches
- Sore throat
- Tiredness
- Chills
- Loss of appetite
- Itchy and watery eyes
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Sometimes, the flu can lead to pneumonia or other serious problems.

What is the treatment?

Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol or other less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or other less costly store brand) may be given for fever, aches and pain. Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your doctor how much medicine to give.

DO NOT give:

- Your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
- Acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months of age without a doctor's advice.
- Ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months of age without a doctor's advice.
- Acetaminophen and ibuprofen together. **DO NOT** alternate.
- Aspirin or any products containing aspirin or salicylates, such as Pepto Bismol.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

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- Give lots of cool, clear liquids so that he does not get dehydrated (dried out).
 - Do not try to force your child to eat. It is normal to have less appetite with the flu.
 - If your child is vomiting, give small sips often.
- Coughing helps clear mucus from the chest and lungs.
 - Most children will not spit out the mucus but will swallow it into their stomachs. This is not a problem.
- **Give cough and cold medicines only as advised by your child's doctor.** This includes both prescription and over-the-counter medicines.
 - For children younger than 6 years of age – cough and cold medicines do not work in this age group. They also can cause serious side effects.
 - Do not give a child younger than 6 years old any medicine that is made for children over the age of 6.
 - Many brands of cough and cold medicines have the same kinds or have unnecessary ingredients. Using more than 1 brand or mixing brands can cause a serious overdose and harm your child.
 - Do not use a combination cold medicine that contains acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest with a gradual return to normal activity.
- Avoid cigarette smoke and odor around your child.

Should my child be tested for the flu?

Your child will not need testing for the flu unless he is admitted to the hospital for treatment. Your doctor will decide on the best treatment for your child based on his condition rather than on lab tests.

Can the flu be prevented?

The best way to prevent the flu is to have a flu vaccine in September or October each year.

- New vaccines are made each year for the types of flu that doctors think will be around that year.
- Your child will need a new vaccine each year.

Flu vaccine can help prevent some types of the flu. A shot is the current recommendation to protect against the flu. The vaccine is advised for all children over 6 months of age.

- Flu shots are given with a needle and contain a dead virus.
 - Shots can be given to children older than 6 months of age.
 - Children younger than 9 years old who have never received the vaccine will need to get 2 flu shots, at least 1 month apart.
 - Children with chronic health problems of all ages should be sure to receive a flu shot.
- Talk with your child's doctor about when to get the flu vaccine.

When should I call the doctor?

Call 911 or your local ambulance service right away if your child:

- Is so tired and weak that he hardly responds to you.
- Is working very hard to breathe or finds it hard to take a breath.
- Grunts when he breathes.
- Has chest retractions (skin pulling in around the ribs and chest when breathing).
- Has a blue or dark purple color to the nail beds, lips or gums.
- Stops breathing for more than 10 seconds.
- Cannot speak while trying to breathe.
- Has any breathing problem that needs care **right away**.

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Call your child's doctor if your child:

- Does not smile or show interest in play for at least a few minutes during a 4-hour period.
- Wheezes or breathes harder than he did when he was seen by the doctor.
- Has a tight feeling in the chest or chest pain.
- Cannot be calmed for at least a few minutes each hour using methods that usually work for your child, such as holding, rocking, pacifiers or soothing talk.
- Has signs of dehydration (drying out):
 - No urine for 6 hours in a baby younger than 1 year old
 - No urine in more than 8 hours in a child older than 1 year old
 - No tears when crying
 - Sunken eyes
 - Dry lips and mouth
- Pulls at his ears or shows signs of ear pain.
- Has any fever (temperature over 100.3°F or 38°C) and is younger than 3 months old, or has a fever lasting longer than 3 days in older babies and children.
- You have any concerns about the way your child looks or feels.

Also, call your child's doctor if your child has any risk factors that could cause him or her to have serious problems from the flu:

- Is very overweight
- Is pregnant
- Has any problems with the nervous system, such as seizures or marked developmental delay
- Has any chronic health problems, such as cancer, immune deficiency, and heart or lung disease

Rarely, the infection can spread to other parts of the body. Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Is not better or still has a feeling of tiredness and weakness in 5 days
- Seems better for a day and then becomes ill again
- Is confused or less responsive
- Extreme weakness
- Dizziness, faints or passes out

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