

Influenza ("Flu", "Grippe")

What is influenza?

Influenza, or the flu, is an illness caused by a group of viruses. The viruses change from year to year. Because of this, even if your child has had the flu in the past, they can be infected again. Influenza affects the respiratory (breathing) system from the nose and throat to the lungs.

How will it affect my child?

- Infection spreads from person to person by direct contact with droplets coughed or sneezed into the air. Illness begins 1 to 3 days after exposure.
- The flu begins with a sudden onset of chills and fever. An older child may tell you of a headache, body ache or sore throat. There may be a dry, hacking cough. Vomiting and diarrhea may be present, but the illness is not the same as intestinal flu. Infants may develop a hoarse cry and a barking cough. Preschool children often have an illness that is more like a severe cold, with high fever (often over 103°F or 39.5°C), runny nose and cough. They may be cranky and not eat well.
- The illness lasts for 3 to 4 days. Cough and a worn out feeling may last for a week or more.
- Not all flu is severe. Even in the same family, one child may be very sick while another child has only a mild illness.

How is it treated?

- Mist from a humidifier or vaporizer may help the dry cough. Do not give cough medicines unless you are told to do so by your child's doctor.
- Pain and temperature over 102° F (38.9° C) may be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra® or others) or with ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®). **Do not use aspirin or any medicines that contain aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid).** Read the label on any over-the-counter medicine you purchase.
- Antibiotics are not needed unless there is a complication such as an ear infection.
- Offer your child fluids often, especially if they have a fever. Your child may not eat well for a few days. This will not harm your child as long as they keep drinking fluids.
- Active play may make a cough worse. Encourage quiet activities and rest for at least the first few days of illness.
- Influenza spreads quickly. Older children should cover their mouths and noses when coughing or sneezing and wash their hands right away after. Keep your child home from school until there is no fever and your child feels better. Coughing may be present for a week or more but if your child has no fever and feels better, your child may go back to school or daycare.

Special directions

A vaccine to prevent the flu is recommended in the fall for everyone. It is especially important for children who are "high risk" such as a child who has cancer, chronic disease of the heart, lungs, kidneys or nervous system or diabetes, asthma or anemia.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child:

- Has a hard time breathing or a bluish look to the lips.
- Has vomiting caused by coughing that continues for several hours and does not stop.
- Is **under** 1 year old and has sunken eyes, no tears when crying and no wet diaper for over 8 hours. These are signs of dehydration. Place cotton balls into the diaper to determine if urine is being passed.
- Is **over** 1 year old and has sunken eyes, no tears when crying and no urine for 12 hours. These are signs of dehydration.
- Has a temperature over 100.4° F (37.8° C) that continues for more than 4 days (96 hours).
- Has a deep cough with lots of mucus.
- Has an earache (babies may pull at the ears, wake up more often or be more irritable or fussy).
- Has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to provide you with additional information about your child's care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.