

FLU (INFLUENZA)

What is the flu?

The flu is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi that occurs in 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 (½ 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 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. Saline nose drops are made by adding ½ 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 daycare or school after the fever is gone and he feels up to it.

Does my child need a flu shot?

Influenza vaccine gives protection for only 1 or 2 years. In addition, the vaccine itself can cause fever in 20% of the people who get the shots and a sore injection site in 10%. Therefore, the vaccine is not recommended for healthy children (unless an especially severe form of influenza comes along). Only children with chronic diseases (for example, asthma) need to come in for yearly influenza boosters. Talk with your health care provider if you think your child should have flu shots.

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

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child is having difficulty 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