



Influenza (Flu) Information for Parents

What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory disease caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. It can be mild, but is sometimes severe and at times can lead to death. It is not the same as the “stomach flu.”

What are the symptoms of flu?

Flu symptoms include fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, and body aches. These symptoms come on quickly and can be bad enough to keep you in bed for several days.

Should my child get a flu vaccination?

Yes. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get flu vaccine every year. Getting a flu shot (or nasal spray) helps protect your child from getting the flu and helps prevent them from passing it to people who can get very sick from flu – like babies, elderly people, and people who have chronic diseases.

Are children at high risk for complications of flu?

Sometimes healthy people – including children – can have serious complications or die from the flu. That’s why it’s important to get vaccinated each year.

Children at risk for serious complications of the flu include:

- Children age 6 months to 5 years
- Children and teens 5-18 years with:
 - Heart disease
 - Asthma or other Pulmonary disease
 - Metabolic disease (diabetes)
 - Immune deficiency
 - Blood disorders
 - Long-term aspirin therapy
- Teens who are pregnant during the flu season

Should my child get one or two doses of flu vaccine?

It depends on your child’s age and whether they got flu vaccine this past year. If your child is 6 months through 8 years old, he or she may need two doses at least four weeks apart. Ask your doctor or clinic.

When should my family get vaccinated?

For best protection, flu vaccine is usually given in early fall before flu season starts. But you can get it anytime during flu season which is typically October through April.

How is flu different from a cold?

Colds are generally less serious than the flu. With a cold, you may have a runny or stuffy nose, while the flu causes body aches, fever, and extreme fatigue. A cold won’t usually keep kids from their normal activities, but kids with the flu will often feel too sick to play. Unlike colds, flu can cause serious health problems like pneumonia, bacterial infections, and hospitalization.

What type of flu vaccine should my child get?

There are now several types of flu vaccine available. Your health care provider will know what type of vaccine is best for your child. The most important thing is to get them vaccinated. Don’t wait for a specific type of flu vaccine to be available.

- **Nasal spray vaccine** – This vaccine is available for healthy, non-pregnant people age 2 to 50 years, so most children and teens can get it. For children 2 through 8 years, the nasal spray is preferred when the child has no contraindications and the vaccine is available. If your provider does not have the nasal spray, your children should get the flu shot. Do not delay vaccination to get the nasal spray vaccine.

- **Quadrivalent vaccine** - This vaccine protects against four strains (or types) of flu: two A strains and two B strains. It is available in the nasal spray or a shot. While this vaccine is designed to protect against more flu strains, its effectiveness will depend on the strains that are circulating during the flu season. If your provider does not have quadrivalent vaccine, your children should get the traditional flu shot.

Can my child be vaccinated if they are allergic to eggs?

In most cases, a child with an egg allergy can be safely vaccinated. Children who experience only hives after eating eggs may be vaccinated with the flu shot. After vaccination, you will be asked to stay to be watched for 30 minutes.

A child who experiences more severe symptoms after eating eggs can also usually be vaccinated. These children should be vaccinated by a provider with experience managing allergic reactions. If your child has other allergies that could be related to an egg allergy but has never consumed eggs, tell your provider. Children with an egg allergy should not receive the nasal spray vaccine.

What if I think my child has the flu?

- Stay home if you or your child is sick.
- Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Children may need fever reducing medications to keep their fever under control. Follow your child's doctor's instructions.
- Antibiotics will not help a person recover from the flu, because flu is caused by a virus, not by bacteria.
- Take your child to the doctor or the emergency room if he or she:
 - Breathes rapidly or with difficulty
 - Has bluish skin color
 - Does not drink enough and becomes dehydrated
 - Does not wake up or interact with others
 - Is so irritable that he or she doesn't want to be held

- Gets better only to become sick again, with fever and a more severe cough
- If you are concerned that something does not seem right with your child, call your doctor or clinic.

What can I do to protect myself and others?

- Get vaccinated.
- Avoid being around others who are sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer.
- Protect infants by not exposing them to large crowds or sick family members when flu is in your community.
- Do not share drinking cups and straws.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets).

What about antiviral medicines?

Antiviral medicines can offer some protection if you have been exposed to flu, but these medications are only recommended for certain groups of people. If you have questions about antivirals, talk to your health care provider.