THE FLU: A Guide For Parents

FLU INFORMATION

What is the flu?
The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. They cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year. Influenza viruses are named for their type and subtype. Influenza viruses that commonly make people sick are influenza A H1N1 viruses, influenza A H3N2 viruses and influenza B viruses. Sometimes a new influenza virus emerges and starts spreading among people.

What is 2009 H1N1 flu?
Last flu season a new influenza A H1N1 virus spread worldwide among people. The new virus was called “2009 H1N1” for the year in which it was discovered and its subtype. (This virus was sometimes called “swine flu” or “novel flu”.) This flu season, scientists expect both the 2009 H1N1 flu virus along with other seasonal influenza viruses to spread and cause illness.

How does flu spread?
Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?
Symptoms of flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea. Some people with the flu will not have a fever.

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How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?
People with flu may be able to infect others by shedding virus from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and might be still contagious past 5 to 7 days of being sick, especially if they still have symptoms.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD

How can I protect my child against flu?
To protect against the flu, the first and most important thing you can do is to get a flu vaccine for yourself and your child. Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. While everyone should get a flu vaccine each flu season, it’s especially important that young children and children with long term health conditions get vaccinated. (See list of conditions under “How Serious is Flu?”) Also, caregivers of children with health conditions or children younger than 6 months old should get vaccinated. (Babies younger than 6 months are too young to be vaccinated themselves.) Another way to protect babies is to vaccinate pregnant women because research shows that this gives some protection to the baby both while the woman is pregnant and for a few months after the baby is born. A new flu vaccine is made each year to protect against the three flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the next flu season. This season’s vaccine protects against the H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season, an influenza A H3N2 virus, and an influenza B virus. This season’s flu vaccine is being made using the same safety and production methods and in the same dose as past flu vaccines. Over the years, millions of flu vaccines have been given in the United States. Flu vaccines have a very good safety record.

Is there medicine to treat the flu?
Antiviral drugs can treat flu illness. They can make people feel better and get better sooner and may prevent serious disorders, and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication. Children with these conditions and children who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy can have more severe illness from the flu.
If your child is sick

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu or www.flu.gov or call 800-CDC-INFO

Flu complications, like pneumonia, for example, that can lead to hospitalization and even death. These drugs are different from antibiotics, but they also need to be prescribed by a doctor. They work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. It’s very important that antiviral drugs be used early to treat flu in people who are very sick (for example people who are in the hospital) or people who are at greater risk of having serious flu complications. Other people with flu illness may also benefit from taking antiviral drugs. These drugs can be given to children and pregnant women.

What are some of the other ways I can protect my child against the flu?

In addition to getting vaccinated, take – and encourage your child to take – everyday steps that can help prevent the spread of germs. This includes:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- If someone in the household is sick, try to keep the sick person in a separate room from others in the household, if possible.
- Keep surfaces like bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by sick persons in your household in the trash.

These everyday steps are a good way to reduce your chances of getting all sorts of illnesses, but vaccination is always the best way to specifically prevent flu.

What should I use for hand cleaning?

Washing hands with soap and water (for as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice) will help protect against many germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

What can I do if my child gets sick?

Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child’s illness.

If your child is 5 years and older and does not have other health problems and gets flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed and make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids.

If your child is younger than 5 years (and especially younger than 2 years) or of any age with a long term health condition (like asthma, a neurological condition, or diabetes, for example) and develops flu-like symptoms, they are at risk for serious complications from the flu. Ask a doctor if your child should be examined.

What if my child seems very sick?

Even children who have always been healthy before or had the flu before can get a severe case of flu.

Call for emergency care or take your child to a doctor right away if your child of any age has any of the warning or emergency signs below:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids (not going to the bathroom or making as much urine as they normally do)
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough.

Can my child go to school, day care or camp if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children or caregivers.

When can my child go back to school after having the flu?

Keep your child home from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. (Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) A fever is defined as 100°F or 37.8°C.
Keep your kids safe. Get their seasonal flu shots every fall or winter.

### Seasonal Flu Guide for Parents

| **Is seasonal flu more serious for kids?** | Infants and young children are at a greater risk for getting seriously ill from the flu. That’s why the New York State Department of Health recommends that all children 6 months and older get the seasonal flu vaccine. |
| **Flu vaccine may save your child’s life.** | Most people with seasonal flu are sick for about a week, and then they feel better. But, some people, especially young children, pregnant women, older people, and people with chronic health problems can get very sick. Some can even die. A flu vaccine is the best way to protect your child from seasonal flu. |
| **What is seasonal flu?** | The flu, or influenza, is a viral infection of the nose, throat, and lungs. The flu can spread from person to person. |
| **Flu shot or nasal-spray vaccine?** | - Flu shots can be given to children 6 months and older.  
- A nasal-spray vaccine can be given to healthy children 2 years and older.  
- Children younger than 5 years who have experienced wheezing in the past year – or any child with chronic health problems – should get the flu shot, not the nasal-spray vaccine.  
- Children younger than 9 years old who get a vaccine for the first time need two doses. |
| **How else can I protect my child?** | - Get the seasonal flu vaccine for yourself.  
- Encourage your child’s close contacts to get seasonal flu vaccine, too. This is very important if your child is younger than 5 or if he or she has a chronic health problem such as asthma (breathing disease) or diabetes (high blood sugar levels).  
- Wash your hands often and cover your coughs and sneezes. This will prevent the spread of germs.  
- Tell your children to:  
  - Stay away from people who are sick;  
  - Clean their hands often;  
  - Keep their hands away from their face, and  
  - Cover coughs and sneezes to protect others. It’s best to use a tissue and quickly throw it away. If you don’t have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands. |
<p>| <strong>What are signs of the flu?</strong> | The flu comes on suddenly. Most people with the flu feel very tired and have a high fever, headache, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and sore muscles. Some people, especially children, may also have stomach problems and diarrhea. The cough can last two or more weeks. |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>How does the flu spread?</strong></th>
<th>People who have the flu usually cough, sneeze, and have a runny nose. The droplets in a cough, sneeze or runny nose contain the flu virus. Other people can get the flu by breathing in these droplets or by getting them in their nose or mouth.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?</strong></td>
<td>Most healthy adults may be able to spread the flu from one day before getting sick to up to 5 days after getting sick. This can be longer in children and in people who don't fight disease as well (people with weaker immune systems).</td>
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<td><strong>What should I use to clean hands?</strong></td>
<td>Wash your children's hands with soap and water. Wash them for as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice. If soap and water are not handy, use wipes or gels with alcohol in them unless they are visibly soiled. The gels should be rubbed into hands until the hands are dry.</td>
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<td><strong>What can I do if my child gets sick?</strong></td>
<td>Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks lots of fluids. Talk with your child's doctor before giving your child over-the-counter medicine. If your children or teenagers may have the flu, never give them aspirin or medicine that has aspirin in it. It could cause serious problems.</td>
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<td><strong>Can my child go to school/day care with the flu?</strong></td>
<td>No. If your child has the flu, he or she should stay home to rest. This helps avoid giving the flu to other children.</td>
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<td><strong>When can my child go back to school/day care after having the flu?</strong></td>
<td>Children with the flu should be isolated in the home, away from other people. They should also stay home until they are symptom-free for 24 hours (that is, until they have no fever without the use of fever-control medicines and they feel well for 24 hours.) Remind your child to protect others by covering his or her mouth when coughing or sneezing. You may want to send your child to school with some tissues, wipes or gels with alcohol in them if the school allows gels.</td>
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For more information about the flu, visit

Or, www.cdc.gov/flu
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

State of New York
Department of Health