

## If Your Child Is Sick

### What can I do if my child gets sick?

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

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids.

If your child is 5 years or older and does not have long-term health problems and gets flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed.

Children younger than 5 years – especially those younger than 2 years – and children with certain chronic health conditions (including asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system), are at higher risk of serious flu complications. Call your doctor or take your child to the doctor right away if they develop flu symptoms.

### What if my child seems *very* sick?

Even healthy children can get very sick from flu. If your child is experiencing the following emergency warning signs, you should go to the emergency room:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish lips or face
- Ribs pulling in with each breath
- Chest pain
- Severe muscle pain (child refuses to walk)
- Dehydration (no urine for 8 hours, dry mouth, no tears when crying)
- Not alert or interacting when awake
- Seizures
- Fever above 104°F that is not controlled by fever-reducing medicine
- In children less than 12 weeks, any fever
- Fever or cough that improve but then return or worsen
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions

This list is not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptom that is severe or concerning.

### How long can a sick person spread flu to others?

People with flu may be able to infect others from one day before getting sick to up to five to seven days after. Severely ill people or infants may be able to spread flu longer, especially if they still have symptoms.

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

No. Your child should stay home to rest until their symptoms have improved to avoid spreading flu to other children or caregivers.

### When can my child go back to school, daycare, or camp after having flu?

Keep your child home from school, day care, or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone and their symptoms have improved or resolved. (The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) A fever is defined as 100°F (37.8°C)\* or higher.

\*Many authorities use either 100 (37.8 degrees Celsius) or 100.4 F (38.0 degrees Celsius) as a cut-off for fever, but this number can vary depending on factors such as the method of measurement and the age of the person.

For more information, visit  
[www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm)  
or call 800-CDC-INFO



## Flu Information



# Flu:

## A Guide for Parents

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. Flu is different from a cold, and usually comes on suddenly. Each year flu viruses cause millions of illnesses, hundreds of thousands of hospital stays and thousands or tens of thousands of deaths in the United States.

Flu can be very dangerous for children. CDC estimates that from the 2010-2011 season to the 2019-2020 season, flu-related hospitalizations among children younger than 5 years old have ranged from 6,000 to 27,000 annually in the United States. The flu vaccine is safe and helps protect children from flu.



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

## How serious is flu?

While flu illness can vary from mild to severe, children often need medical care because of flu. Children younger than 5 years and children of any age with certain long-term health problems are at higher risk of flu complications like pneumonia, and sinus and ear infections. Some health problems that are known to make children more vulnerable to flu include asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system.

## How does flu spread?

Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly by droplets made when someone with flu coughs, sneezes or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. A person also can get flu by touching something that has flu virus on it and then touching their mouth, eyes, or nose.

## What are flu signs and symptoms?

Flu symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, feeling tired and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults). Not everyone with the flu will have a fever.

## Protect your child

### How can I protect my child from flu?

The first and best way to protect against flu is to get a yearly flu vaccine for yourself and your child.

- Flu vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older every year. Flu shots and nasal spray flu vaccines are both options for vaccination.
- It's especially important that young children and children with certain chronic health problems get vaccinated.
- Caregivers of children at higher risk of flu complications should get a flu vaccine. (Babies younger than 6 months are at higher risk for serious flu complications, but too young to get a flu vaccine.)

- Pregnant people should get a flu vaccine to protect themselves and their baby from flu. Flu vaccination during pregnancy protects babies from flu for several months after birth.

Flu viruses are constantly changing and so flu vaccines are updated often to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the upcoming flu season.

### Are flu vaccines safe?

Flu vaccines have an excellent safety record. Millions of people have safely received flu vaccines for decades. Flu shots and nasal spray flu vaccines are both options for vaccination. Different types of flu vaccines are licensed for different ages. Each person should get one that is appropriate for their age. CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend an annual flu vaccine for all children 6 months and older.



### What are the benefits of getting a flu vaccine?

- **A flu vaccine can keep you and your child from getting sick.** When vaccine viruses and circulating viruses are matched, flu vaccination has been shown to reduce the risk of getting sick with flu by about 40 to 60 percent.
- **Flu vaccines can keep your child from being hospitalized from flu.** A recent study showed that flu vaccine reduced children's risk of severe life-threatening influenza as much as 75%.
- **Flu vaccine can be life saving in children.** A study using data from multiple flu seasons found that flu vaccine reduced the risk of flu-associated death by half among children with higher risk medical conditions and by nearly two-thirds among healthy children.
- **Flu vaccination also may make your illness milder if you do get sick.**

- **Getting yourself and your child vaccinated also can protect others** who may be more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health problems.

### Is there a medicine to treat flu?

Yes. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that can be used to treat flu illness. They can shorten your illness and make it milder, and they can prevent serious complications that could result in a hospital stay. Antivirals work best when started during the first two days of illness. Antiviral drugs are recommended to treat flu in people who are very sick (for example, people who are in the hospital) or people who are at increased risk of serious flu complications. Antivirals can be given to children and pregnant people.

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

- In addition to getting a flu vaccine, you and your child should take everyday actions to help prevent the spread of germs.
- Stay away from people who are sick; cover your cough and sneezes; wash your hands often with soap and water; do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth; and clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with flu viruses.

These everyday actions are a good way to reduce your chances of getting sick and prevent the spread of germs to others if you do get sick. However, a yearly flu vaccine is the best protection against flu illness.

