

Influenza (The “Flu”)

Influenza (in flu EN za), also known as “the flu,” is an illness caused by a virus. A child who has the flu may have some or all of these symptoms:

- High fever
- Headache
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea

In some people, the flu may lead to sinus or ear infections, pneumonia, or dehydration (being “dried out”). People who have diabetes, heart or lung problems may have worse symptoms of the diseases when they have influenza.

Diagnosis

The doctor or nurse will examine your child and take a medical history. Sometimes a test is done to help determine if he or she has influenza or some other illness.

Treatment

Antibiotic medicines will not work against the virus that causes influenza. However, your child’s doctor may prescribe an antiviral medicine to treat influenza or antibiotics to treat some of the bacterial complications of influenza. If the child has pain or fever, you may also give Tylenol® (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen. **Do not give your child aspirin!** (Picture 1) **Do not give ibuprofen (Motrin®) to children younger than 6 months.**

How Flu Spreads

The flu virus spreads in droplets that spray through the air when a person coughs, sneezes, or even laughs. The virus gets into the mouth or nose of other people nearby (within 3 feet) or onto surfaces such as tables, desks, phones, pencils, etc. When other people touch these things, the virus can spread from their hands into their eyes, nose or mouth. The flu virus can live on some surfaces such as toys and countertops up to 2 days. A person can infect others as much as a day before symptoms appear, and for at least seven days after getting sick.



Picture 1 Never give aspirin if you think your child has the flu.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child’s doctor if he or she has any of the following symptoms:

- High fever (over 101°F by mouth, or 102°F rectally) that lasts more than 12 hours. For infants 3 months and younger, call if rectal temperature is 100.5°F.
- Signs of dehydration (being “dried out”). These signs include dry lips, fewer wet diapers, not drinking. See the Helping Hand, *Dehydration: Giving Liquids at Home*, HH-I-207.
- Trouble breathing
- Little or no appetite
- Any other symptoms that do not go away or get worse

How to Prevent the Flu

All persons ages 6 months or older should have a routine influenza (Flu) vaccine every year. People who have had a severe allergic reaction to eggs SHOULD NOT get this vaccine. If you know you or your child have an allergy to eggs, talk to the doctor before receiving the vaccine. Also, be sure to tell the doctor if your child has previously had a bad reaction to any shots.

Types of Vaccines

There are two types of vaccines: Injections (shots) and intranasal (taken in through the nose).

- The intranasal form of the vaccine is for healthy people ages 2 to 49 years who are not pregnant.
- The intranasal vaccine should not be given to those who have certain allergies (such as gentamicin), those who take certain medicines, such as aspirin, or with certain medical conditions, such as a weak immune system.
- Any one caring for a person with a weak immune system should not get the intranasal vaccine.
- Make sure to tell your doctor if you or your child has any medical problems before receiving the vaccine.

In addition, there are many things you and your child can do to keep from getting the flu:

1. Good hand washing is VERY important! Clean your hands and your child’s hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand wipes or gel hand cleaner. When using alcohol gel hand cleaner, rub hands together until the gel is dry. If using soap and warm water, wash for 15 to 20 seconds, or the same amount of time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song two times (Picture 2). Refer to the Helping Hand, *Hand Hygiene*, HH-IV-80.
2. Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or into a tissue that can be thrown away.



Picture 2 Practice good hand hygiene!

How to Prevent the Flu, continued

3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth whenever possible.
4. Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
5. Stay home when you are sick, unless you are going to the doctor or hospital. Avoid contact with others.
6. Do not share eating utensils (spoons, etc.), drinking glasses, or other personal items.
7. Practice good health habits: eat a balanced diet, drink plenty of water, and get enough rest to keep your immune system strong.

When You and Your Child Are at the Doctor's Office, Clinic, Or Hospital

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and throw away the used tissue in the wastebasket.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- You may also be asked to wear a mask to protect others if you have flu symptoms.
- Don't worry if you see staff and others wearing masks. They are preventing the spread of germs.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your child's doctor or nurse.