

The Flu: A Guide for Parents



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Flu is an illness that you can catch easily from others. The flu is caused by a set of viruses. The viruses infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. Flu is different from a cold. Flu can cause mild to severe illness. At times, it can lead to death. The flu can be very dangerous for children. CDC estimates that between 6,000 and 26,000 children younger than 5 years old have been hospitalized each year in the United States because of flu.

The flu vaccine is safe and helps protect children from flu. The best way to prevent flu is to get a flu vaccine each year.

What parents should know

How serious is flu?

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 high risk of flu complications. These complications include pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections. Some health problems are known to make children more vulnerable to flu. These include asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system.

How does flu spread?

The virus spreads from one person to others through:

- The air when someone with the flu coughs or sneezes.
- Tiny wet drops that spray out when a person who has flu coughs, sneezes or talks. They can land in the mouths or noses of people who are near you. Or they can go into someone's lungs when a person breathes in.
- Touching something, like an object or surface, with the virus on it. Then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before you wash your hands.

What are flu symptoms?

People who have flu feel some or all of these symptoms:

- fever* or feeling chills
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose



- muscle or body aches
- headaches
- tiredness
- some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. This is more common in kids than adults.

*some people with the flu will not 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 vaccines are 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 long-term health problems get vaccinated.
- Caregivers of children at high risk of flu complications should get a flu vaccine. (Babies younger than 6 months are at high risk for serious flu complications, but too young to get a flu vaccine.)
- Pregnant women should get a flu vaccine to protect themselves and their baby from flu. Research shows that flu vaccination protects the baby from flu for several months after birth.
- Flu viruses are constantly changing and 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.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

Flu vaccines are made using strict safety and production measures. Millions of people have safely received flu vaccines for decades. 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. Flu vaccinations have been shown to reduce the risk of getting sick with flu by about half.
- Flu vaccines can keep your child from being hospitalized from flu. One recent study showed that flu vaccine reduced children's risk of flu-related pediatric intensive care unit admission by 74%.
- Flu vaccine can prevent your child from dying from flu. A study using data from recent flu seasons found that flu vaccine reduced the risk of flu-associated deaths by half among children with high risk medical conditions. And by nearly two-thirds among children without medical conditions.
- 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 long-term health problems.

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

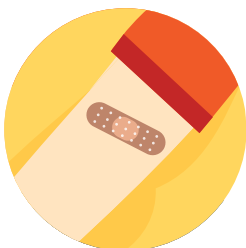
In addition to getting a flu vaccine, you and your child should take everyday actions to help prevent the spread of germs. Stay away from people who are sick. If you or your child are sick, avoid others as much as possible to keep from infecting them. Also, remember to regularly cover your coughs and sneezes, wash your hands often, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and clean surfaces that may be contaminated with flu viruses. These everyday actions can help reduce your chances of getting sick and prevent the spread of germs to others if you are sick. However, a yearly flu vaccine is the best way to prevent flu illness.

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.

Children younger than 5 years of age – especially those younger than 2 years – and children with certain long-term health problems (including asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system), are at high 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?

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
- In children less than 12 weeks, any fever
- Fever or cough that improves, but then returns or worsens
- 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.

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 2 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 high risk of serious flu complications who get flu symptoms. Antivirals can be given to children and pregnant women.

How long can a sick person spread flu to others?

People with flu may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to up to 5 to 7 days after. Severely ill people or young children may be able to spread the flu longer, especially if they still have symptoms.

