

# Influenza (Flu) Information for Parents

## Should my child get a flu vaccination this year?

Yes. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get flu vaccine this year.

While everyone should be vaccinated, it is especially important for children at risk for serious complications of the flu. These include:

- Children age 6 months to 5 years
- Those age 5-18 years with:
  - Heart disease
  - Pulmonary disease including asthma
  - Metabolic disease (diabetes)
  - Immune deficiency
  - Blood disorders
  - Long-term aspirin therapy
- Teens who are pregnant during the influenza season

Getting a flu shot (or nasal spray) helps protect your child from getting the flu, so he or she won't pass it to people who risk getting very sick – like babies, elderly people, and people who have chronic diseases.

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

That will depend 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.

## Is flu vaccine safe?

Yes. This year's flu vaccine is made in the same way as past flu vaccines. Flu vaccines have an excellent safety record – with an average of 100 million doses used in the U.S. each year.

## Are children at high risk for complications of influenza?

Most healthy children can weather the flu, even with a high fever. But that's not always true for children younger than 5 years old and those with chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes.

Serious complications of flu occur most often in young infants, people with chronic health conditions, and the elderly.

Sometimes healthy people – including children – can have these serious complications or die from the flu. That's why we need to take flu very seriously and get vaccinated each year.

**Everyone 6 months of age and older should get flu vaccine this year.**

## What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza is a contagious respiratory disease that can be prevented by immunization. It is not the same as the "stomach flu." Flu is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death.

## What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms come on quickly in the form of fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, stuffed-up nose, and body aches. These symptoms can be severe and put you in bed for several days.

## How is flu different from a cold?

A cold generally stays up in the head while the flu brings body aches, fever, and extreme fatigue. A child with a cold will usually keep up with normal activities. A child with the flu will often feel too sick to play.

## What about the nasal vaccine, FluMist?

Healthy individuals 2 through 49 years of age, including those who have contact with or are caregivers of infants under 6 months of age, can receive FluMist. Check with your doctor or clinic.



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## **When should my family get vaccinated?**

Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu shot every year. For best protection, flu vaccine is usually given in the fall before flu season starts. But you can get it anytime during flu season.

## **What if you think you or your child has the flu?**

- **Stay home if you are ill and keep your child home from school or daycare if they are ill.**
- Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Antibiotics will not help a person recover from the flu, because flu is caused by a virus, not by bacteria.
- Children often need help keeping their fever under control. Follow your child's doctor's instructions.
- 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, or
  - 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 you do to protect yourself and others?**

- Get vaccinated.
- Avoid being exposed to others who are sick with a flu-like illness.
- 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.
- Don't expose infants unnecessarily to large crowds when influenza is in your community. Avoid close contact between the baby and family members who may be sick.
- Do not share drinking cups and straws.

- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets).
- Do not smoke around children.

## **What about antiviral medicines?**

Antiviral medicines can offer some protection, but they are only recommended for use in certain groups of people. If you have questions about antivirals, talk to your doctor.

**Find a flu shot at  
[www.mdhflu.com](http://www.mdhflu.com)**

# Flu Symptom Screening Tool For Parents and Caregivers

Use this questionnaire each day your child is sick with flu-like symptoms and follow the instructions for when to keep the child home and what to tell the child's school.

## Does your child have:

1. Fever of 100° F or higher?  Yes  No  
(Take the child's temperature before giving him/her fever-reducing medicine, like Tylenol.)
2. Sore throat?  Yes  No
3. Cough?  Yes  No



## Should I Keep My Child Home?

- If you checked "yes" for fever AND one of the other symptoms, keep your child home for at least 24 hours after his or her fever is gone without fever-reducing medicine. For many children this will be 5 to 7 days. Your child should feel well enough to participate in school before returning. If you have questions about your child's health or symptoms, call your child's doctor or clinic.
- If your child has been diagnosed by a doctor or clinic with a different disease, such as strep, follow your doctor or clinic's recommendation and school policy for when to return to school.

## What Should I Tell My Child's School?

- If you checked "yes" for fever AND one of the other symptoms, tell the school that your child is home with influenza-like illness.
- If your child has been diagnosed by a doctor or clinic with a different disease, such as strep, tell your child's school.



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