

# Flu Information - A Guide for Parents

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## What is the flu?

The flu (also known as influenza) is a common and highly contagious respiratory infection that affects the nose, throat and lungs. It is caused by a flu virus that changes year-to-year. Immunization helps strengthen a body's natural immune response against the flu. The flu shot stimulates a person's immune system to build antibodies against the virus, making it stronger and ready to fight off the flu.

**Make sure your child gets the shot - so they don't get the flu.**

## Is the flu a serious illness?

The flu illness can vary from mild to severe in all age groups. Young children, age five and under, are among those at the greatest risk of serious illness from influenza. It can be especially dangerous for children of any age who have certain long term health conditions that require regular medical attention such as asthma (even mild or controlled), diabetes, heart or lung disease, or a weakened immune system. Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.

## Is there a medicine to treat the flu?

Antiviral drugs can treat the flu illness. They can make people feel better and get better sooner. They may also prevent serious flu complications that can lead to hospitalization and even death. Antiviral drugs work best when started in the first 2 days of symptoms to treat people who are sick and can be given to children and pregnant women. *Antibiotics* do not treat viruses such as the flu.

## How does the flu spread?

The flu virus spreads droplets in the air from person to person when coughing, sneezing, or talking. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. A person may also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus on it and then touching their own eyes, mouth, or nose. Viruses can live on your hands for up to five minutes and they can live on hard surfaces that you touch with your hands - like toys and table tops - for up to two days.

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

The flu virus can be spread to others from 1 day before getting sick to about 5-7 days after getting sick. This time can be longer in children and people with a weakened immune system. This means that your child may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know he or she is sick.

## What are the symptoms of the flu?

fever* (not everyone with the flu will have a fever)	cough	sore throat
runny or stuffy nose	body aches	headache
sometimes vomiting and diarrhea		chills
		fatigue

## What can I do to protect my child against the flu?

**The first and most important thing you can do protect against the flu is to get a flu vaccine for yourself and your child.**

- Vaccination is recommended yearly for everyone 6 months and older, especially for children with long term health conditions.
- It takes about 2 weeks after getting the flu shot to develop protection against the flu for up to 1 year.

**Protect yourself, protect your family. Get the flu shot.**

- Caregivers of children with health conditions or of children younger than 6 months old should get vaccinated. (Babies younger than 6 months are too young to be vaccinated.)
- 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.
- The flu shot is available free of charge from your family doctor and public health clinics. For anyone age five and older, you can also visit one of almost 2,000 pharmacies across Ontario now offering the flu shot.

A new flu vaccine is made each year to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the next flu season. Flu vaccines are made using strict safety and production measures.

**Take - and encourage your child to take - everyday actions to help prevent the spread of germs.**

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- Stay away from people who are sick.
- If your child has flu-like symptoms, try to keep him or her in a separate room from others in the household, if possible.
- CDC recommends that your sick child stay home from school or child care programs for at least 24 hours after his or her fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If a tissue is not available, teach children to use their sleeve or elbow.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for 15 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- 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.

## What can I do if my child gets sick with the flu?

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 in the past, can get very sick from the 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 not 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
- Fever with a rash
- 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 or day care if he or she is sick with the flu?

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 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 (37.8°C) or higher.

## What additional preventive actions can I take to protect my child from germs that can cause respiratory illness, like the flu?

- Find out about plans your child's school or child care program has if an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs and whether flu vaccinations are offered on-site.
- Make sure your child's school or child care program routinely cleans frequently touched objects and surfaces, and that they have a good supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs, and disposable wipes on-site.
- Ask how sick students and staff are separated from others and who will care for them until they can go home.

***Protect your child. Get your flu shots today. Early immunization is the most effective way of preventing the flu.***