



Influenza (Flu) Fact Sheet for Child-Care Settings

What is the flu?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The viruses attack the nose, throat, and lungs. Influenza is not to be confused with “stomach flu”, an inflammation of the stomach and intestines. The flu can be prevented by vaccination.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu include fever, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, headache, and extreme tiredness. Some children may have additional symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea.

How is the flu spread?

The flu is spread when an infected person who has the flu coughs or sneezes and sends the flu virus into the air. The virus enters the nose, throat, or lungs of a person and multiplies. Flu also spreads (though less likely) when a person touches the surface of an object that has flu viruses on it. The virus then enters and infects the body when the person touches his or her nose or mouth.

Is the flu dangerous?

Children less than 2 years old—even healthy children—are at high risk of ending up in the hospital if they get the flu. Vaccinating young children, their families, and other caregivers can help protect them from getting sick. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections as complications from the flu.

Can the flu be prevented?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year. The CDC recommends getting vaccinated in September or as soon as the 2012-2013 seasonal influenza vaccine is available. Getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial. Influenza activity typically occurs all year long, but usually peaks in Texas in February or March.

Other measures to prevent the flu include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home from work or school when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, thus reducing the spread of germs

What should you do if you get the flu?

If you have the flu (or a temperature of 100.4°F or higher):

- Stay home
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Cover your mouth when coughing and sneezing
- Wash your hands frequently

If symptoms get worse, seek medical attention. Parents should contact their health-care provider immediately if they have any concerns about their child's recovery. This would include a child having problems breathing, being too sleepy, or not taking enough fluids.

DO NOT give aspirin to children for treatment of flu symptoms because of the risk of Reye syndrome, an acute and potentially life-threatening condition that results when children take aspirin or aspirin-containing products during certain viral illnesses.

Who should get vaccinated?

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends an annual influenza vaccine for all people aged 6 months and older.

Children aged 6 months through 8 years require 2 doses of the influenza vaccine during their first season of vaccination. The 2 doses should be administered a minimum of 4 weeks apart. Doing this provides the most effective protection against the flu.

The flu vaccine is not approved for use in children less than 6 months old. Children under 6 months old can also get very sick from the flu, but they are too young to get a flu vaccine. The best way to protect young children is to make sure that their household members and their caregivers are vaccinated.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

The flu vaccine is safe and effective. The risk of the flu vaccine causing serious harm or death is extremely small. However, like any medicine, a vaccine may rarely cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. Almost all people who receive an influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it.

What are the side effects that could occur?

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Low-grade fever

Where can you get more information?

Call your doctor, nurse, local health department, or the Texas Department of State Health Services, Immunization Branch at (800) 252-9152 for more information.