

Influenza (Flu) Information for Parents

Dear Families,

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- ☐ **Because you or your child may have been exposed to influenza, or the flu**
 - ☐ **For informational purposes only**
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What is Influenza (Flu)?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can range from mild to severe and may lead to serious complications, especially in young children, older adults, and individuals with weakened immune systems. The flu season typically occurs in the fall and winter, with peak activity between December and February.

Common Symptoms in Children

Children with the flu may experience a combination of the following symptoms:

- **Fever** (often high, 100°F or higher)
- **Cough** (usually dry)
- **Sore throat**
- **Runny or stuffy nose**
- **Headache, muscle aches, or body aches**
- **Fatigue or weakness**
- **Vomiting or diarrhea** (more common in children than adults)

Symptoms typically appear 1–4 days after exposure to the virus and can last for a week or longer.

How Does the Flu Spread?

The flu is highly contagious and spreads easily in daycare, school, and home settings. It can be transmitted through:

1. **Respiratory droplets:** When an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, droplets can land in the mouths or noses of others nearby.
2. **Contaminated surfaces:** Touching surfaces or objects (e.g., toys, doorknobs) with the virus and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes.

Children, especially those in daycare or school, are at higher risk of contracting and spreading the flu due to close contact with others and less consistent hygiene practices.

Complications of the Flu in Children

While most children recover from the flu without serious issues, some may develop complications, including:

- **Pneumonia** (lung infection)
 - **Dehydration** (from vomiting, diarrhea, or refusal to drink fluids)
 - **Worsening of chronic medical conditions** (e.g., asthma, diabetes)
 - **Ear or sinus infections**
 - In rare cases, severe complications like encephalitis (brain inflammation) or sepsis can occur.
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Prevention Tips

1. **Annual Flu Vaccination:**
 - The flu vaccine is the most effective way to prevent the flu.
 - Everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated each year.
 - Vaccination not only protects your child but also helps prevent the spread of the flu to others, including vulnerable populations.
2. **Practice Good Hygiene:**
 - Teach children to wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
 - Encourage children to avoid touching their face, especially their eyes, nose, and mouth.
3. **Cover Coughs and Sneezes:**
- Teach children to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their elbow when coughing or sneezing.
 - Dispose of tissues immediately and wash hands afterward.
4. **Clean and Disinfect Surfaces:**
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys, doorknobs, and tables.
5. **Stay Home When Sick:**
- Keep your child home if they show flu-like symptoms to prevent spreading the virus to others.
 - Children should stay home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.
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When to Seek Medical Care

Contact your child's healthcare provider if they experience any of the following:

- Difficulty breathing or fast breathing
- Bluish skin color (indicating lack of oxygen)
- High fever (especially if it persists for more than 3–4 days)
- Fever with a rash
- Persistent vomiting or inability to keep fluids down
- Signs of dehydration (e.g., dry mouth, no tears when crying, reduced urination)
- Severe irritability, lethargy, or unresponsiveness
- Symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Seek emergency care immediately if your child shows signs of severe illness, such as trouble breathing, chest pain, or confusion.

Treatment for the Flu

- **Rest and Hydration:** Ensure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks fluids to stay hydrated.
 - **Fever Reducers:** Use age-appropriate medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen to reduce fever and relieve aches. Avoid aspirin in children due to the risk of Reye's syndrome.
 - **Antiviral Medications:** In some cases, a healthcare provider may prescribe antiviral drugs (e.g., oseltamivir/Tamiflu) to reduce the severity and duration of the illness. These are most effective when started within 48 hours of symptom onset.
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Additional Resources

For more information about the flu, visit:

- [Maryland Department of Health – Influenza Information](#)
 - [Nationwide Children's Hospital – Flu in Children](#)
 - [CDC – Influenza](#)
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Stay Informed, Stay Healthy!

By working together, we can help protect our children and community from the flu. Encourage vaccination, practice good hygiene, and keep sick children home to prevent the spread of illness.

This comprehensive handout combines information from the Maryland Department of Health and Nationwide Children's Hospital for educational purposes. Please consult your family physician or other medical provider for advice or consultation prior to any medical decision or action.