

About

Flu is the short term for influenza. It is an illness caused by a respiratory virus. The infection can spread rapidly through communities as the virus is passed from person to person. When someone with the flu coughs or sneezes, the influenza virus gets into the air, and people nearby, including children, can inhale it. The virus also can be spread when your child touches a contaminated hard surface, such as a door handle, and then places his hand or fingers in his nose/mouth or rubs his eye.

The flu season usually starts in October and ends in May. When there is an outbreak or epidemic, usually during the winter months, the illness tends to be most pronounced in preschool or school-aged children. Adult caregivers are easily exposed and can contract the disease. The virus usually is transmitted in the first several days of the illness.



All influenza viruses cause a respiratory illness that can last a week or more. Flu symptoms include:

- A sudden fever
- Chills and body shakes
- Headache, body aches, being more tired than usual
- Sore throat
- Dry, hacking cough
- Stuffy, runny nose

The Flu vaccine is for the respiratory influenza viruses, not the common stomach flu viruses that cause fever, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Flu Vaccination

After the first few days of these symptoms, a sore throat, stuffy nose, and continuing cough become most evident. The flu can last a week or even longer. A child with a common cold usually has a lower fever, a runny nose, and only a small amount of coughing. Children with the flu—or adults, for that matter—usually feel much sicker, achier, and more miserable.

Healthy people, especially children, get over the flu in about a week or two, without any lingering problems. However, you might suspect a complication if your child says that his ear hurts or that he feels pressure in his face and head or if his cough and fever persist beyond 2 weeks. Talk with your child's doctor if your child has ear pain, a cough that won't go away, or a fever that won't go away.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that an influenza vaccine be given annually to all children starting at six months of age. Children 6 month through 8 years old may need two doses of the vaccine given at least four weeks apart. Children 9 years of age and older only need one dose.

Flu vaccines are especially important for children at high risk for complications from the flu such as those with a chronic disease such as asthma, heart disease, and decreased immune system function due to a primary condition or from medications such as steroids, renal disease, or diabetes mellitus.

All eligible children may receive the inactivated flu shot. All adults should receive the flu vaccine yearly; this is especially important for adults who live in the same household as someone who has a high risk for flu complications or who care for children under the age of five.