

In flu season, knowledge & actions can make a difference

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The Flu: A Guide For Parents

FLU INFORMATION

What is the flu?

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. Flu viruses cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year.

The flu can be very dangerous for children. Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.

How serious is the flu?

Flu illness can vary from mild to severe. While the flu can be serious even in people who are otherwise healthy, it can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age who have certain long-term health conditions, including asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders (such as diabetes), kidney, liver, and metabolic disorders, and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

Children with these conditions and children who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy can have severe illness from the flu.

How does the flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching something that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults). Some people with the flu will not have a fever.

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

People with the flu may be able to infect others by shedding virus from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and may be still contagious past 5 to 7 days of flu illness, especially if they still have symptoms.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD

How can I protect my child against the flu?

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

- ▶ Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.
- ▶ It's especially important that young children and children with long term health conditions get vaccinated. (See list of conditions in "How serious is the flu?")
- ▶ 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 themselves.)
- ▶ Another way to protect babies is to vaccinate pregnant women. Research shows that flu vaccination gives some protection to the baby both while the woman is pregnant and for up to 6 months after the baby is born.

Flu vaccine is updated annually to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the upcoming flu season. Flu vaccines are made using strict safety and production measures. Over the years, millions of flu vaccines have been given in the United States with a very good safety record.

Some things don't change. The best way to protect against the flu and other illnesses is simply good hand-washing: a good scrubbing that lasts at least 20 seconds.

In your workplace and at home, frequently sanitize commonly touched areas such as light switches, door handles, computer keyboards/mouse, phones, commode handles and faucets.

Despite a committed work ethic, people who are feeling ill should minimize germ transmission to co-workers and fellow students. The Center for Disease Control & Prevention, CDC, recommends staying home from work or school for at least 24 hours after a fever is gone without the use of a fever reducing medicine. Rest and good nutrition will help to build strength and provide your immune system to fight the next germs you encounter.

It's not too late to get a flu shot. The CDC recommends everyone over the age of 6 months should receive a yearly flu vaccine.

At Dunham, beneficiaries receive a flu shot on a walk-in basis, by checking in at the Reception Desk. Hours: <http://dunham.narmc.amedd.army.mil/HealthcareServices/SitePages/Allergy%20and%20Immunization.aspx>

Flu season is not officially over until May.

The U.S. Dunham Army Health Clinic had fewer than 20 positive flu results in the month of January. Most of these positive results were Influenza A.

You can track Pennsylvania cases at

--<http://www.health.pa.gov/My%20Health/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/I-L/Pages/20172018-Influenza-Season.aspx#.WolMS8lOmj>

Nationwide, CDC reports a rate of 51.4 flu cases per 100,000 people. Widespread flu activity has been reported in 49 of 50 states and Puerto Rico during the current flu season.

How do you know that it's flu?

Traditionally, high fevers are the telltale sign of influenza versus other viral or bacterial infections.

Other common symptoms include fatigue, chills, headaches, achiness, sinus congestion, coughs, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.

Patients with severe flu symptoms should be seen by a provider. Since influenza is a virus, providers are able to treat the symptoms, only, as a rule. Sometimes if providers see patients at the onset of symptoms, they may order antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu, that are designed to lessen the duration of the flu by one or two days and possibly reduce the severity of the symptoms.

According to the CDC, flu illness can vary from mild to severe. While the flu can be serious even in people who are otherwise healthy, it can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age with certain long-term health conditions, including asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological and neuro-developmental conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders (such as diabetes), kidney, liver, and metabolic disorders, and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication.

Be cautious in selecting legitimate online medical advice, e.g., the CDC site offers real-time data about flu activity and recommends prevention, diagnosis, and treatment measures, at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>.

Is there a medicine to treat the flu?

Antibiotic drugs are prescription medicines that can be used to treat and prevent infection. They can make people feel better and get better sooner. Antibiotics can't cure the flu because it's caused by a virus. Antibiotic drugs are different from antivirals, which fight against harmful infections. They work when bacteria cause the flu. 2 types of antivirals, oseltamivir and zanamivir, can be used to treat the flu in people who are very sick. The example, people who are in the hospital or who are at high risk of being sent to the hospital.

What are some of the other ways I can protect my child against the flu?

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- Stay away from people who are sick.
- If your child is sick with flu, don't share toys, books, or other items with others in the household. If possible, CDC recommends that you sick child stay home and not go to school until they feel better. Stay home except to get medical care or for other necessities. The best time to be around others is the use of a face mask.
- Clean your hands and soap with water when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after it has been used.
- Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect hand surfaces and objects that

IF YOUR CHILD IS SICK

What can I do if my child gets sick? Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child's illness.

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids. 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.

Children younger than 5 years of age – especially those you age 2 years and – and children with certain chronic conditions, including asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system, at high risk of serious flu-related complications. If your child is at high risk for flu complications, call your doctor or take them to the doctor right away if they develop flu-like symptoms.

What if my child seems very sick? Even generally healthy children can get very sick from the flu.

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids. 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.

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Stupor or extreme drowsiness
- Not drinking enough fluids (not going to the bathroom or not wanting to eat or drink)
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not responding
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and rapid cough
- Has other conditions like heart or lung disease, diabetes, asthma and/or weakened immune system.

Wash or sanitize hands with soap, including underarms, surfaces, kitchen counters and toys for children. Clean by wiping them down with a 70 percent alcohol-based sanitizer for 20 seconds or the amount listed.

These everyday steps can go a long way to reduce your chances of getting sick. However, a really flu vaccine is the best protection against flu illness.

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Can my child go to school, day care or camp if he or she is sick?
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 from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medication. A fever is defined as 100°F (37.8°C) or higher.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu or www.fda.gov or call 800-CDC-INFO

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