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Seasonal Flu Basics

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It spreads from person-to-person and can cause mild to severe illness; and in some cases, can lead to death.

- In the United States, yearly outbreaks of seasonal flu usually happen during the fall through early spring.
- The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.
- Deaths from flu-related causes range from 3,300 to 48,600 (average 23,600)
- **Some groups are more likely to have complications from the seasonal flu. These include:**
 - those age 65 and older
 - children younger than 2 years old
 - people of any age who have chronic medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, asthma, congestive heart failure, lung disease)
- **Complications from the flu can include:**
 - bacterial pneumonia
 - ear or sinus infections
 - dehydration
 - worsening of chronic medical conditions

Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5 to 20 percent of the population get the flu
- More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related complications
- Deaths from flu-related causes range from 3,300 to 48,600 (average 23,600)



Is it a Cold or the Flu?

Flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses.

- Flu and the common cold have similar symptoms (e.g. fever, sore throat). It can be difficult to tell the difference between them.
- Your doctor can give you a flu test within the first few days of your illness to determine whether you have the flu.
- In general, the flu is worse than the common cold.
- Symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense with the flu.
- Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose.
- Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

- **Vaccine for 2010-2011 Influenza Season**

The 2010-2011 seasonal influenza vaccine includes protection against three flu viruses, an H3N2 virus, an influenza B virus and the H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season. As is always the case with seasonal vaccine, younger children who have never had a seasonal vaccine will still need two doses.

- **Children, Flu, and Vaccination**

The single best way to protect against seasonal flu and its potential severe complications in children is to get a seasonal influenza vaccine each year. The seasonal flu vaccine protects against three influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. The 2010-2011 flu vaccine protects against 2009 H1N1, and two other influenza viruses (an H3N2 virus and an influenza B virus).

- Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a seasonal flu vaccine. This includes all children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday.
- If a child is receiving flu vaccine for the first time, the child will need 2 doses, spaced four weeks apart.
- Children commonly need medical care because of influenza, especially before they turn 5 years old.
- Severe influenza complications are most common in children younger than 2 years old.
- Children with chronic health problems like asthma and diabetes are at especially high risk of developing serious flu complications.

Flu Symptoms

It is important to watch for any signs that your child doesn't feel well and to pay attention to any unusual behavior. Although the symptoms for all flu are similar, infants could have a fever or be lethargic, but may not have a cough or other respiratory symptoms.

All types of flu can cause:

- **Fever**
- **Coughing and/or sore throat**
- **Runny or stuffy nose**
- **Headaches and/or body aches**
- **Chills**
- **Fatigue**

What to Do If Your Child Gets Sick

Call your doctor right away if your child gets sick. Antiviral medications used to treat flu in some patients work best when started within the first 2 days (48 hours) of getting sick.

- The doctor may start your child on antiviral drugs even after 48 hours when symptoms began, especially if the child has been hospitalized or is at high risk for flu-related complications.
- Children younger than 5 years old and children with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, may be at higher risk for complications from flu. Check with your doctor about any special treatment requirements for them.
- **Some [over-the-counter medicines](#)** are approved for children to use to relieve flu symptoms.
- If your child has a fever, use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor recommends based on your child's age.
- A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). If you are not able to measure a temperature, the child might have a fever if he or she feels warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering.
- **Keep your sick child home until at least 24 hours after the child no longer has a fever or signs of a fever (100°F or 37.8°C) (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol®).**
- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants, Pedialyte®) to keep from being dehydrated.
- Keep your sick child in a separate room in the house as much as possible to limit contact with household members who are not sick.
- Consider having just one person be the main caregiver for the sick child.
- You can consider sending your child back to school after at least 24 hours has passed since his or her temperature returned to normal WITHOUT the use of medications.

Over-the-Counter Medication Guidance

Your child or teen will probably feel miserable with body aches, sore throat, and other symptoms of the flu. Taking certain over-the-counter medicines can help relieve their flu symptoms. A doctor will decide if antiviral medications are necessary.

Call the doctor's office if your child experiences any side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, rash, or unusual behavior. See [Caring for Someone Sick at Home](#) for more details.

Patient Age	DOs	DON'Ts
Children/teenagers 5 – 18 years old	<p>DO take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), to relieve symptoms. They do not contain aspirin.</p> <p>DO Check ingredient labels on over-the-counter cold and flu medications to see if they contain aspirin.</p>	DON'T take aspirin or products that contain aspirin (e.g. Pepto-Bismol®). This can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
Children younger than 4 years of age	<p>DO ask your doctor before using over-the-counter medications (e.g. Children's Tylenol®, Children's Motrin®).</p> <p>DO follow the doctor's instructions exactly to avoid dosing errors.</p>	DON'T give children over-the-counter cough and cold drugs containing antihistamines to help them sleep.
Children younger than 2 years of age	<p>DO use a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.</p> <p>DO follow the doctor's instructions for care.</p>	DON'T give over-the-counter cough and cold drugs to children younger than 2 years old.

[When to Get Emergency Medical Care](#)

If your child has any of these signs, seek emergency medical care right away:

- fast breathing or trouble breathing
- bluish or gray skin color
- not drinking enough fluids
- severe or persistent vomiting
- not urinating or no tears when crying
- 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
- has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough