

The Dangers of the Flu for Children

The flu, also known as influenza, is more dangerous than the common cold for children and poses a serious threat to the health and well-being of children and their families each year.

- ▶ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that since 2010, flu hospitalizations among children younger than five years ranged from 6,000 to 27,000 per year in the United States. Many more have to go to a doctor, an urgent care center or the emergency room because of flu.
- ▶ While relatively rare, even healthy children die from the flu each year. Since 2004-2005, flu-related deaths in children reported to CDC during regular flu seasons have ranged from 37 deaths to 199 deaths each year.
- ▶ Approximately 80% of pediatric flu deaths occurred in children not vaccinated against the flu.
- ▶ Severe flu complications are most common in children younger than two, and children with chronic health problems, like asthma and diabetes. These complications include: pneumonia, dehydration, worsening of long-term medical problems like heart disease or asthma, brain dysfunction, sinus problems and ear infections.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of the flu may include:

- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Tiredness
- ▶ Cough
- ▶ Sore throat
- ▶ Runny/stuffy nose
- ▶ Muscle aches
- ▶ Nausea

Vomiting and diarrhea can also occur and are much more common among children than adults. People may be infected with flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

SPREAD OF THE FLU

The main way that the flu is spread from person to person is through coughs and sneezes of an infected person. Coughs and sneezes cause droplets of the flu virus to move from the infected person and onto another person or objects around him or her.

A transfer can also occur when a person touches their own nose or mouth after coming into contact with infected droplets, nose drainage, or saliva from an infected person. Such contact can occur by touching an infected person directly or by touching an object contaminated with these fluids, such as a used facial tissue. Touching the nose or mouth of a third person after such contact can also infect that person.

Newly infected adults and caregivers are able to spread the flu as early as one day before showing symptoms. They will continue to be contagious up to seven days after the symptoms have begun. This period can be longer in children and in people who don't fight disease as well, such as older persons or those with an otherwise weakened immune system.

If your child develops a fever (100°F or higher under the arm, 101°F or higher orally, or 102°F or higher rectally), chills, cough, sore throat, headaches, or muscles aches, keep your child at home until their temperature has been normal for 24 hours without the need for fever-reducing medicine.

SHOULD MY CHILD GO TO SCHOOL OR DAY CARE IF OTHER CHILDREN ARE SICK?

It is not unusual for some children in schools or day cares to get sick during the winter months. If many children get sick at your child's school or day care, it is up to you to decide whether or not to keep him or her home at that time. You may want to check with your doctor for specific guidance, especially if your child has other health problems.

PREVENTION OF THE FLU

A flu vaccine offers the best defense against flu and its potentially serious consequences and also can reduce the spread of flu to others. Getting vaccinated against flu has been shown to reduce flu illnesses, doctor's visits, missed work and school days, and reduce the risk of flu-related hospitalization and death in children.

Teaching your child to cover his or her nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing and to wash his or her hands immediately after coming into contact with any infected fluids, including their own, will help them keep both themselves and others safe from infection. Washing your hands is the best way to ensure that you do not spread the flu after contamination.

Remind your child to cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing or wear a mask to protect others. You may also want to send facial tissues and alcohol-based wipes/gels with your child for use at school.

VACCINATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The CDC strongly recommends that the following people in contact with certain groups of children get a flu vaccine in order to protect the children in their lives from the flu:

- ▶ Close contacts of children younger than five years of age (people who live with them)
- ▶ Out-of-home caregivers (nannies, day care providers, etc.) of children younger than five years of age
- ▶ People who live with or have other close contact with a child of any age with a chronic health problem (asthma, diabetes, etc.)
- ▶ All health care workers

For information about who needs a flu vaccine and when, please visit the [CDC INFLUENZA](https://www.cdc.gov/flu) webpage ([cdc.gov/flu](https://www.cdc.gov/flu)).

TYPES OF FLU VACCINE

A vaccine helps your body to protect itself against a disease. This year there are two types of vaccine for flu: the shot (given with an injection, usually in the arm) and the nasal spray vaccine. Getting a flu vaccine will not give you the flu or any other type of illness.

CHILDREN AT GREATEST RISK OF FLU COMPLICATIONS

The groups of children listed below are at increased risk for flu complications.

1. Children younger than six months' old

The flu vaccine is not approved for use in infants younger than six months. However, the risk of flu complications is higher in these young infants than it is for children in other age groups. The best way to protect children younger than six months is to make sure their families and caregivers are vaccinated.

2. Children aged six months up to their fifth birthday

Even children in this age group who are otherwise healthy are at risk simply because their immune system is not yet fully developed. In addition, otherwise healthy children between the ages of two and five years are more likely to be taken to a doctor, an urgent care center, or the emergency room because of the flu than older children are. To protect their health, all children ages six months or older should be vaccinated against the flu each year. Vaccinating their families and caregivers can also help protect them from getting sick.

3. American Indian and Alaskan native children

These children are more likely to have severe flu illness that results in hospitalization or death.

4. Children six months and older with chronic health problems

Children with a chronic health problem, such as asthma or other problems of the lungs; neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions; chronic lung disease; heart disease; blood disorders; endocrine disorders; kidney disorders; liver disorders; metabolic disorders; weakened immune system due to disease or medication; children who are taking aspirin or salicylate-containing medicines; extreme obesity, are at particular risk of flu complications and should be vaccinated as early as possible. Their families and caregivers should also be vaccinated to help protect these particularly vulnerable children.

WHEN TO GET CHILDREN VACCINATED

Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as the vaccine is available, ideally in October, but vaccinations are available throughout the flu season, which usually peaks in January.

Because flu viruses change every year, the vaccine is updated annually. So even if you or your children received a flu vaccination last year, you and your children both still need to get a flu vaccine this season to be protected. If October and November slip by and you haven't received your vaccinations, you are still able to get vaccinated in December or later.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHILDREN BEING VACCINATED AGAINST THE FLU FOR THE FIRST TIME

It is especially important for children of six months to nine years of age who are getting a flu vaccine for the first time to receive the vaccine as early as possible. This is because these children will need to receive two doses of vaccine, spread apart by a minimum of 28 days.

If possible, the first dose should be given as soon as vaccine becomes available around October. The second dose should be given soon after the 28-day period has passed. The first dose primes the immune system, while the second dose provides immune protection. Children receiving the vaccine for the first time that only get one dose can have reduced to no protection from the flu.

Please note: it usually takes about two weeks after the second dose for protection against the flu to begin, so be sure to schedule the second dose as early as you can after the 28-day period.

IS THERE MEDICINE TO TREAT THE FLU?

There are antiviral drugs for children ages one year and older that can reduce flu symptoms and help a child get better faster, but these drugs need to be approved by a doctor. They should also be started during the first two days that a child is sick for them to work best. Your doctor can discuss with you if these drugs are right for your child.

WHERE CAN I GET MY CHILD VACCINATED?

Contact your health care provider or parish health unit to make a vaccination appointment. Check parish level information online at [VACCINE AVAILABILITY \(ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3640\)](https://www.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3640).

Your local pharmacy may offer influenza vaccine which may be administered to any individual age seven (7) or older. Locate pharmacies providing flu vaccinations at <https://www.vaccines.gov/find-vaccines/>.