

Let's Talk ABOUT...

The flu (influenza) and flu vaccination

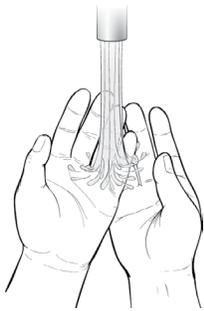
The word “flu” is short for “influenza” (in-floo-EN-za). A virus causes the flu. These viruses often appear in winter and early spring.

The flu virus causes a person to have fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, dizziness, loss of appetite, and tiredness. It can also cause runny nose, sore throat and nausea. People sometimes confuse the flu with a cold. It can also be confused with other illnesses that make you sick to your stomach, have diarrhea, or feel achy. The real flu, though,

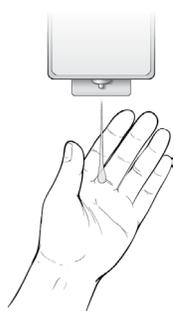
is a severe respiratory infection that spreads easily from person to person. It happens quickly and affects the nose, throat, and lungs. A person who is exposed to the virus will usually become sick in one to three days.

The “stomach flu” is not the flu at all; it is caused by other viruses. If your child is vomiting, see the handout *“Let’s Talk About... Vomiting”* for more information on how you can help. If your child has diarrhea, see the handout *“Let’s Talk About... Diarrhea and Dehydration.”*

Hand washing with soap and water



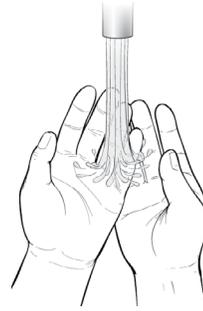
Wet hands with warm, running water.



Apply liquid soap or use a clean bar of soap. Lather well.



Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers.

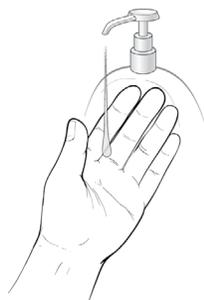


Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.



Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Hand washing with a hand-rub product

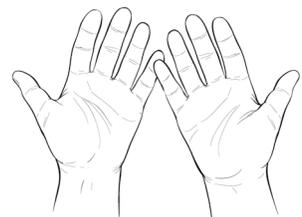


Use a product that contains at least 60% alcohol. Apply product to the palm of your hand. Read the product label to see how much to apply.



Be sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers.

Rub your hands together until they are dry.



How do I prevent my child from getting the flu?

The flu spreads easily by direct contact with mucus from an infected person. Breathing in droplets that someone has coughed or sneezed into the air also spreads the flu.

There are two main ways to prevent the flu: limiting exposure to the virus and getting the flu vaccine.

Teach your child ways to prevent spreading or being exposed to the virus. These include:

- Have him cover his mouth and nose when he coughs or sneezes.
- Have him use tissues to clean his nose.
- Have him wash his hands after coughing, sneezing or cleaning his nose.

Set a good example by doing these things yourself. Keep children who have the flu away from elderly people and anyone with a long-lasting (chronic) illness. You should also follow these guidelines:

- Stay away from crowded places, such as movie theaters, malls, and even church meetings and nurseries during a flu epidemic.
- Wash dishes in hot, soapy water to kill viruses.
- The best way to prevent respiratory infections is to wash your hands often and well. Apply soap to wet hands and scrub hands vigorously for 10 to 15 seconds before rinsing (see picture below).

Why should my child get vaccinated?

The simplest way to prevent the flu is with a vaccine. This can reduce the chance of getting the flu by 60 percent to 80 percent. Talk to your doctor about starting yearly flu vaccines.

Who should get a flu vaccine?

- 1 Anyone who wants to reduce the risk of getting the flu should consider getting the vaccine.
- 2 Children from the ages of six months to 18 years old should receive the vaccine. This age group has a high rate of complications and being admitted to the hospital from the flu.

3 Children six-months-old or older who have the following high-risk conditions should have the vaccine:

- Lung diseases or lung problems such as asthma or cystic fibrosis
- Heart disease
- Cancer or lowered immune systems from medication
- Sickle cell anemia or other blood diseases
- Diabetes, kidney problems, central nervous system disease, arthritis, or long-term aspirin use

4 Any household member or caregiver of children listed above in group 3.

5 Any household member or caregiver of children, newborn to 6 years old.

Why does my child need to have the vaccine each year?

There are many types, or strains, of the flu virus that change over time. Each year scientists figure out which strains of the virus are most likely to reach the United States. The vaccine companies then make a new vaccine to fight those strains of virus. The vaccine is available each fall.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

The flu vaccine is safe for almost everyone. Muscle aches, fever, and other flu-like symptoms may occur six to twelve hours after getting the vaccine, but they are rare. Children who are allergic to eggs should take precautions because eggs are used to make the vaccine. If your child is allergic to eggs, he should be skin-tested before getting the vaccine to make sure it is safe.

The vaccine is only recommended for children older than six months of age. If you have an infant under the age of six months, or if you have a child with a high-risk condition, the rest of your family should get flu vaccines. Flu vaccine is safe for pregnant women and is recommended to protect your newborn.

When should my child receive the flu vaccine?

The best time to get the vaccine is in October before the flu season starts. The next best time is in November, but if that is not possible, getting a flu vaccine at anytime during the flu season will still help, even through the spring season. Children under 9 years old who are getting the vaccine for the first time need two doses, one month apart. A new nasal (by nose) vaccine has been approved for people between the ages of five and 49 years old. Talk with your primary caregiver to see if it will be available in your area.

What happens when a person gets the flu?

Children with the flu usually have sudden onset of chills, fevers, headaches, body aches, sore throats, and dry coughs. They can have a high fever. They may also have diarrhea or vomiting as well as the other symptoms. Your child will likely be irritable and have a poor appetite. The worst of the illness lasts for three to four days. The cough and tired feeling may go on for a week or more. Not all cases of the flu are severe. Even in the same family one child may be very sick; another child may have a milder illness. Children may go back to school or day care when their temperature is normal and they feel better. A lingering cough is not always a reason to remain at home.

How do you treat the flu?

Antiviral (ant-eye-VIE-ral) drugs that fight influenza are available. Your doctor can make sure your child has the flu by testing mucus from his nose. If the test shows that he has the flu, your doctor can prescribe medicine to help. The medicine helps more if it is started early. It works best if the medicine is given on the first day your child is sick. Children with the flu should rest in bed. Rest helps the body fight the virus. Give your child a non-aspirin medicine to relieve aches and pains and to reduce fever. Non-aspirin acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®, Panadol®, Liquiprin®) is safe for your

child. Never give your child aspirin. Aspirin is linked to a serious liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome. This disease can happen when aspirin is taken at the same time a child has the flu or chicken pox.

Mist from a humidifier or vaporizer may help the cough. It is best not to give strong cough medicines. These can keep your child from bringing up mucus in the chest. Your doctor may recommend a medicine, however, if he continues to have a dry cough.

Antibiotics are not needed for most children who have the flu. They will be used only if your child develops a complication, such as an infection.

The flu often lessens a child's appetite. Don't expect your child to eat much for the first few days. Help your child to drink fluids. This is very important if he has a fever. Any juice or soft drink he likes is okay. Encourage, but don't force him, to drink fluids.

Active play can make a cough worse. Quiet activities are best during the first few days of the illness.

Some children who have long-term illness such as asthma, cancer, or diabetes may become sicker with the flu and may need to go to the hospital or to see their doctor.

Call your doctor immediately if...

Your child has any of the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- A bluish color to the lips
- Vomiting that continues for several hours
- Severe lack of energy
- Severe muscle aches
- Much less urine than usual

Call during regular office hours if your child:

- Complains of an earache, or if he's an infant, he pulls at his ears
- Becomes more cranky or keeps waking up at night
- Has a deep cough with lots of mucus
- Has a fever greater than 100°F (37.8°C) that lasts more than four days

Where can I get a flu vaccine?

- From your pediatrician or family physician
- Adults and children 12 and older: from the outpatient pharmacy at Primary Children's Medical Center
- From your local health department