



Influenza Information for Parents and Guardians

What is influenza (also called flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

What are the signs and symptoms of the flu?

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms that usually start suddenly, not gradually:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in young children than in adults

How does the flu spread?

The flu virus is spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

When can a person with the flu spread it to others?

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Although people with the flu are most contagious in the first 3-4 days after their illness begins, some otherwise healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

Should I get the flu vaccine now?

It is not too late to get vaccinated. All people 6 months of age and older are recommended to annually receive the influenza vaccine. Getting vaccinated yourself protects people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illnesses, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions. While flu vaccine is not perfect and some people who get vaccinated may still get the flu, there is some data to suggest that flu vaccination may make the illness milder.

How can I protect my child from catching the flu?

In addition to getting an annual influenza vaccine, take everyday preventive actions that help slow the spread of germs that cause respiratory (nose, throat, and lungs) illnesses, like flu.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and limit contact with others while sick to keep from infecting them.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs that can cause respiratory illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw it in the trash after you use it and wash your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs that can cause respiratory illnesses like flu.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.

Teach your child to:

- Cover cough and sneezes.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand rub can be used.
- Get in the habit of not touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
- Not share “bites” of finger foods, spoons, forks, drinking cups or bottles with friends.

What should I do if my child is sick?

- As always, you should keep your sick child home. **Do not send them to school/daycare.** Use your judgement to decide if your child can recover at home with rest and fluids or needs to see a doctor. Call your family doctor if you have questions and follow their advice.
- Although antibiotics are not effective against viruses, antiviral medicines can help shorten the flu’s course. These medications are available only by prescription and are usually not needed in mild cases. Once again, you should follow your family doctor’s advice about your child’s care.
- Keep tissues close to the sick person and have a trash bag within reach.
- Children who are sick with flu-like illness should **stay home until they are fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medications and are able to participate comfortably in activities.**

For more information go to the New Jersey Department of Health flu website at <http://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/flu.shtml> and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>