

## The Danger of Flu to Children

Flu is more dangerous than the common cold for children. Each year, flu places a large burden on the health and well-being of children and families.

- ▶ Children commonly need medical care because of influenza, especially before they turn 5 years old.
- ▶ Each year an average of 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized because of influenza complications.
- ▶ Some children will die from the flu each year. During the 2011-12 flu season, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) received reports that 34 children died from influenza-related complications.
- ▶ 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.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of flu include fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches and nausea. Vomiting and diarrhea also can occur and are much more common among children than adults.

### Spread of the Flu

The main way that flu is spread is from person to person through coughs and sneezes. This can happen when people are exposed to droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person, or when a person has direct contact with droplets, nose drainage or saliva from an infected person, or a soiled object, and then touches one's own (or someone else's) nose or mouth before washing hands. To prevent the spread of flu, teach your child to cover their nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing and to wash their hands immediately.

Adults and caregivers may be able to spread the flu from one day before getting sick to five days after getting sick. This can be longer in children and in people who don't fight disease as well, such as people with a weakened immune system.

If your child develops fever (100 F or higher under the arm, 101 F orally or 102 F rectally) or 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. Remind your child to cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing to protect others. You may want to send facial tissues and alcohol-based wipes or gels with your child for use at school.

### *Should my child go to school/day care if other children are sick?*

It is not unusual for some children in school/day care to get sick during the winter months. If many children get sick, it is up to you to decide whether to send your child to school/day care. You might want to check with your doctor, especially if your child has other health problems.

### *Types of Influenza Vaccine*

There are two types of seasonal influenza vaccine:

- ▶ Inactivated (killed) vaccine or the "flu shot" given by injection into the muscles; and
- ▶ Live, attenuated (weakened) influenza vaccine is sprayed into the nostrils.

*Although this year's flu vaccine is identical to last year's, the CDC is recommending that everyone still get their flu shot again this year.*

### *Vaccination Recommendations*

Vaccination is the best method for preventing flu and its potentially severe complications in children.

**CDC recommends that all children between the ages of 6 months and 19 years get a flu vaccine.**

**CDC also recommends that people in contact with certain groups of children get a flu vaccine** in order to protect the child (or children) in their lives from the flu.

The CDC has provided the following guidance for individuals who come in contact with young children:

- ▶ Close contacts of children younger than 5 years old (people who live with them) should get a flu vaccine.
- ▶ Out-of-home caregivers (nannies, day care providers, etc.) of children younger than 5 years old should get a flu vaccine.

- ▶ People who live with or have other close contact with a child or children of any age with a chronic health problem (asthma, diabetes, etc.) should get a flu vaccine.
- ▶ In addition, CDC recommends that all health care workers be vaccinated each year to keep from spreading the flu to their patients.

***For information about other people recommended for vaccination, either because they are at high risk for serious flu-related complications, or because they are contacts of high risk people, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).***

### ***Children at Greatest Risk of Flu Complications***

The following groups of children are at increased risk for flu complications:

#### **1. Children younger than 6 months old**

The flu vaccine is not approved for use in infants younger than 6 months old; however, the risk of flu complications is higher in these young infants than it is for any other child age group. The best way to protect children younger than 6 months is to make sure members of their household and their caregivers are vaccinated.

#### **2. Children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years**

It is estimated that each year in the U.S., more than 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized due to flu. Even children in this age group who are otherwise healthy are at risk simply because of their age. In addition, children between the ages of 2 and 5 years are more likely to be taken to a doctor, an urgent care center or the emergency room because of flu than healthy older children. To protect their health, all children 6 months and older should be vaccinated against the flu each year. Vaccinating young children, their families and other caregivers can also help protect them from getting sick.

#### **3. Children 6 months and older with chronic health problems, including:**

- ▶ asthma or other problems of the lungs;
- ▶ immune suppression;
- ▶ chronic kidney disease;
- ▶ heart disease;
- ▶ HIV/AIDS;
- ▶ diabetes;
- ▶ sickle cell anemia;
- ▶ long-term aspirin therapy; or

- ▶ any condition that can reduce lung function such as cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders.

### ***When to Get Children Vaccinated***

Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as vaccine is available and continue throughout the flu season, into December, January and beyond. While influenza outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the flu activity peaks in January or later.

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

### ***Special Instructions for Children Being Vaccinated Against Flu for the First Time:***

Children 6 months up to 9-years-of-age getting a flu vaccine for the first time will need two doses of vaccine the first year they are vaccinated. If possible, the first dose should be given as soon as vaccine becomes available. The second dose should be given 28 or more days after the first dose. The first dose "primes" the immune system; the second dose provides immune protection. Children who only get one dose, but need two doses can have reduced or no protection from a single dose of flu vaccine. Two doses are necessary to protect these children. If your child needs two doses, begin the process early, so that children are protected before influenza starts circulating in your community. Be sure to follow up to get your child a second dose if they need one. It usually takes about two weeks after the second dose for protection to begin.

### ***Is there medicine to treat the flu?***

There are antiviral drugs for children 1 year and older that can make your child feel better and get better sooner, but these drugs need to be approved by a doctor. They should be started during the first two days that your 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?***

Many private doctors and parish health units provide immunizations. Call your health care provider or parish health unit and make an appointment. Also, check the Shots for Tots website for immunization outreach efforts in your area at [www.shotsfortots.com](http://www.shotsfortots.com).