

Influenza (Flu) Information for Childcare Settings

What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory disease caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. Illness is usually mild or moderate, not requiring hospitalization. However, at times flu can be severe, even leading to death. It is not the same as the “stomach flu.”

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Flu symptoms include fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, and body aches. These symptoms usually begin suddenly and might be severe enough to stop your daily activities.

How is the flu different from a cold?

A cold generally stays in the head while the flu brings body aches, fever, and extreme fatigue. A child with a cold will usually keep up his or her normal activities. A child with the flu will often feel too sick to play. Also, symptoms of flu usually come on very suddenly – a child will be okay one hour and ill the next hour.

How serious is flu in children?

Unfortunately, we see complications of flu and flu-related deaths every year – including deaths and serious illness in children. Serious complications of flu occur most often in the elderly, in people with chronic health conditions, and in children under 5 years of age.

Which children should get flu vaccine?

Flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. It is especially important for:

- Children 6 months to 5 years old
- All children with chronic diseases including:
 - Heart disease
 - Pulmonary disease, including asthma
 - Metabolic disease (diabetes)
 - A weakened immune system
 - Blood disorders
 - Long-term aspirin therapy
 - Neurological conditions (including epilepsy, cerebral palsy and disorders of the spinal cord or brain)

Should childcare staff be vaccinated for flu?

Yes. Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. It is especially important for those who care for children including childcare workers, parents, and other household contacts. Find a flu

vaccine near you on our [Where to Get Vaccinate](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/immunize/basics/vaxfinder.html) (www.health.state.mn.us/people/immunize/basics/vaxfinder.html) page.

What about children under 6 months of age?

Children under 6 months are too young to receive flu vaccine. However, to prevent the spread of the flu, close contacts and out-of-home caregivers should be vaccinated.

What other things can be done to keep flu from spreading?

- **Stay at home if you have flu-like symptoms.**
- Encourage parents to keep children at home if they have any symptoms of flu.
- Avoid exposing yourself to others who are sick with a flu-like illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze. And then throw the tissue away.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Clean hands frequently with soap and water or with an alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer.
- Avoid sharing anything that goes into the mouth such as drinking cups and straws.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, water fa

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