**What is “The Flu?”**

Seasonal influenza, “the flu,” is caused by a virus. Anyone, at any age, can get the flu. Children commonly need medical care because of the flu, especially before they turn 5 years old. Severe influenza complications are most common in children younger than 2 years old. The virus infects the respiratory tract – nose, throat and lungs. Unlike the common cold, the flu is much more dangerous for children. There are different strains of the flu virus circulating each year, so each flu season is different. The best way to prevent the flu is by your child receiving a flu vaccine each year.

[http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm) syndicated link

**When is the flu season?**

Flu can occur at any time of the year, but commonly peaks between December and February. It can begin as early as October and continue to May. Flu viruses are constantly changing. They can change from one season to the next or even change during the flu season. Some flu seasons are mild and some are severe, but every year your child can be at risk of coming down with the flu.

The annual flu vaccines typically protects against multiple strains of the flu. Even if the vaccine is not an exact match, the vaccine still has benefits. Receiving the annual flu vaccine can reduce how sick your child actually becomes.

**When should your child receive the vaccine?**

Everyone aged six months and older should receive their flu shot. There are very few exceptions. Talk to your child’s doctor about flu vaccines, including which flu vaccine option is best for your child. You can also visit [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/whoshouldvax.htm#egg-allergy](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/whoshouldvax.htm#egg-allergy) to find out more information on the types of vaccinations and which might be best.
How the flu spreads:
Flu can spread from person to person, from up to six feet away. Flu is spread when people sneeze, cough or talk or by touching a surface with flu virus on it and then touching your own mouth or nose. Children can spread the virus for longer than 7 days. Since symptoms start 1 to 4 days after your child may be infected, they can spread the flu before anyone knows they are sick! Children who are infected may not even have symptoms – but they can still spread the flu virus.

Symptoms of the flu:
The flu usually comes on suddenly. Most people who get the flu will recover in a few days to less than two weeks. Children who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills (not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children)

When to call your doctor:
All children can be at risk for serious complications from the flu. If your child develops flu-like symptoms, you can contact their doctor to discuss the best treatment options and care. If your child is younger than five years (especially those younger than 2), or if they have a chronic medical condition, they are considered to be at “high-risk”. Call your doctor right away if your child is in any of these high-risk groups.

Call for emergency care or take your child to a doctor right away if your child of any age has any of the warning or emergency signs below:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids (not going to the bathroom or making as much urine as they normally do)
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough.
Treatment for the flu:

Your doctor will decide whether to test your child for the flu. Your doctor may prescribe antiviral drugs to treat the flu. If a child gets sick with the flu, antiviral drugs offer a safe and effective treatment option. Flu antiviral drugs can make flu symptoms milder and can shorten the length of illness. Antiviral drugs work best if started within two days of symptoms starting. Early treatment of the flu with antiviral drugs has also been shown to reduce ear infections and the need for antibiotics in children between the ages of 1 and 12 years old.

Your child should not attend school, day care or other activities for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine. This will help prevent the spread of flu.

How can I help prevent the spread of the flu?

Vaccinate! Vaccination is the most important thing you can do to prevent illness for your children!

You can also practice good habits to help prevent the spread of the flu:

Limit Contact! If your child is sick, try to keep the child in a separate room from others in the household.

Stay Home! Keep your child home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone, except to get medical care or for other necessities. The fever should be gone without using fever-reducing medicine.

Don't Touch! Teach your child to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.

Use Those Tissues! Teach your child to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze and to throw the tissue in the trash after use. Make sure he or she knows not to sneeze into his or her hands! Encourage your child to sneeze into their upper sleeve or elbow – their "germ catcher."

Wash! Have your child wash their hands often with soap and water. Make hand washing a fun activity by singing songs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Clean it Up! Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu. Bedside tables, bathrooms, the kitchen and toys should be disinfected.

Pay Attention to Public Health Officials! If an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs, follow public health advice. This may include information about how to increase distance between people and other measures.

For more information, go to www.cdc.gov/flu

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County Health Officials of New York
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The Campaign to ImmuNYze all New Yorkers is an initiative of the County Health Officials of New York (NYSACHO) to bring together patients, parents, providers and campaign partners to heighten awareness of the need to immunize throughout life—from infancy to senior years.

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