



Influenza (Flu) Fact Sheet for Child-Care Settings

What is the flu?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The viruses attack the nose, throat, and lungs. Flu can be prevented by vaccination. Influenza is not to be confused with “stomach flu”, an inflammation of the stomach and intestines which is not caused by influenza viruses.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu may include a sudden onset of fever, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, headache, chills, and extreme tiredness. Some children may have additional symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea.

How is the flu spread?

The flu is spread when an infected person who has the flu coughs or sneezes and sends the flu virus into the air. The virus enters the nose, throat, or lungs of a person and multiplies. Flu also spreads (though less likely) when a person touches the surface of an object that has flu viruses on it. The virus then enters and infects the body when the person touches his or her nose or mouth. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others one day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. Children can infect others for 10 or more days after the start of their symptoms.

Is the flu dangerous?

Children younger than 5 years old—even healthy children—are at high risk of ending up in the hospital if they get the flu. Vaccinating young children, their families, and other caregivers can help protect them from getting sick. Children may also get sinus problems and ear infections as complications from the flu.

Can the flu be prevented?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year. The CDC recommends getting vaccinated in September or as soon as the 2014-2015 seasonal influenza vaccine is available. Getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial. Influenza activity typically occurs all year long, but usually peaks in Texas in late January to mid-February.

Other measures to prevent the flu include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home from work or school when you are sick until fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, thus reducing the spread of germs