



Health Tips for Parents

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What do I need to know about the flu?

Children under the age of 5 are more likely to be hospitalized from influenza (flu) complications than those in other age groups. Annual flu vaccines are the best way to protect your child and family from the flu.

Seasonal Influenza

Seasonal influenza is a contagious, but preventable, respiratory illness that can be dangerous for young children. Every year, approximately 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized because of complications from the flu, with some developing serious health problems such as pneumonia or bacterial infections. Although deaths are rare, dozens of children die from flu complications every flu season.

While influenza and the common cold are both caused by respiratory viruses, flu symptoms are significantly more severe, says Carlos Lerner, MD, UCLA pediatrician. Although both illnesses can produce congestion, runny noses and coughs, flu symptoms often also include high fevers (over 102°F), body aches, sore throat, vomiting and diarrhea.

Prevention

Hand-washing, covering coughs and using alcohol-based gels can help stop the virus

from spreading, but the most effective approach for prevention is the flu vaccine, Dr. Lerner advises.

Unlike some viruses, influenza viruses vary from season to season. While some vaccinations provide lifetime protection against a particular disease, a new flu vaccine is formulated every year to contain the strains expected to be most common during the upcoming flu season. This flu season, only flu shots are recommended. This year, the nasal-spray flu vaccine is not recommended, as it has been ineffective in protecting against the flu for the last several seasons.

Children with the flu should not go back to school until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever. Children at higher risk of developing complications (such as those with asthma) and children with severe symptoms (such as trouble breathing or dehydration) should be examined by their pediatricians. They may receive anti-viral medications such as Tamiflu.

Benefits of flu vaccination:

- Provides antibodies in the body to protect against infection
- Reduces risk of contracting the flu
- Reduces risk of flu-associated hospitalization
- If you do get sick, the vaccine will reduce illness severity
- Protects people around you who are vulnerable to serious illness



When to vaccinate

Flu season typically runs between late October and March. Children should receive the flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available as it takes about two weeks for the vaccine to develop flu-fighting antibodies. Your pediatrician or a local clinic/pharmacy can provide your child with vaccination services. Rare side effects include soreness or redness at the injection site, hoarseness, red eyes, cough and mild fever lasting one to two days. The flu vaccine, however, cannot make a child sick with the flu.