

Keep your kids safe. Get their flu shots every year.

# The Flu: A Guide for Parents

## Is the flu more serious for kids?

Infants and young children are at greater risk for getting seriously ill from the flu. That's why the New York State Department of Health recommends that all children 6 months and older get the flu vaccine.

## Flu vaccine may save your child's life.

Most people with the flu are sick for about a week, and then they feel better. But, some people, especially young children, pregnant women, older people, and people with chronic health problems can get very sick. Some can even die. An annual vaccine is the best way to protect your child from the flu. The vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months and older every year.

## What is the flu?

The flu, or influenza, is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs. The flu can spread from person to person.

## Who needs the flu shot?

- Flu shots can be given to children 6 months and older.
- Children younger than 9 years old who get a vaccine for the first time need two doses.

## How else can I protect my child?

- Get the flu vaccine for yourself.
- Encourage your child's close contacts to get the flu vaccine, too. This is very important if your child is younger than 5, or if he or she has a chronic health problem such as asthma (breathing disease) or diabetes (high blood sugar levels). Because children under 6 months can't be vaccinated, they rely on those around them to get an annual flu vaccine.
- Wash your hands often and cover your coughs and sneezes. It's best to use a tissue and quickly throw it away. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands. This will prevent the spread of germs.
- Tell your children to:
  - Stay away from people who are sick;
  - Clean their hands often;
  - Keep their hands away from their face, and
  - Cover coughs and sneezes to protect others.

## What are signs of the flu?

The flu comes on suddenly. Most people with the flu feel very tired and have a high fever, headache, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and sore muscles. Some people, especially children, may also have stomach problems and diarrhea. The cough can last two or more weeks.



### **How does the flu spread?**

People who have the flu usually cough, sneeze, and have a runny nose. The droplets in a cough, sneeze or runny nose contain the flu virus. Other people can get the flu by breathing in these droplets or by getting them in their nose or mouth.

### **How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?**

Most healthy adults may be able to spread the flu from one day before getting sick to up to 5 days after getting sick. This can be longer in children and in people who don't fight disease as well (people with weaker immune systems).

### **What should I use to clean hands?**

Wash your children's hands with soap and water. Wash them for as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice. If soap and water are not handy, use a hand sanitizer. It should be rubbed into hands until the hands are dry.

### **What can I do if my child gets sick?**

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks lots of fluids. Talk with your child's doctor before giving your child over-the-counter medicine. If your children or teenagers may have the flu, never give them aspirin or medicine that has aspirin in it. It could cause serious problems.

### **Can my child go to school or day care with the flu?**

No. If your child has the flu, he or she should stay home to rest. This helps avoid giving the flu to other children.

### **When can my child go back to school or day care after having the flu?**

Children with the flu should be isolated in the home, away from other people. They should also stay home until they have no fever without the use of fever-control medicines and they feel well for 24 hours. Remind your child to protect others by covering his or her mouth when coughing or sneezing. You may want to send your child to school with some tissues, and a hand sanitizer, if allowed by school.

**For more information about the flu, visit**

**[health.ny.gov/flu](http://health.ny.gov/flu)**

**Or, [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)**

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

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