

Facts about Influenza (Flu)

A virus causes influenza. Influenza usually happens in the winter and lasts from 2 to 7 days or longer. Influenza is a more serious illness than a cold.

Some signs of influenza are:

- fever, cough
- headache
- body aches and pain
- feeling weak
- sneezing, coughing, stuffy nose
- sore throat

Sometimes, young children may not want to eat because they have an upset stomach. They may vomit and have changes in their bowel movements. Children under five years may not have a fever.

The danger of influenza is that it makes the body weak and open to other infections such as pneumonia, a serious lung infection.

Antibiotics will not stop the influenza virus, but sometimes are needed, if the child develops another infection. Anyone can get flu, but some people are more likely than others to get a serious illness with the flu.

Influenza is usually most dangerous in very young children under 2 years of age; the elderly (65 years and older) and children and adults with chronic health conditions such as heart or kidney disease and asthma.

How is Influenza Spread?

Influenza is spread in droplets coughed or sneezed into the air by an infected person and can be spread by contact with things that a person with flu has touched or coughed or sneezed on.

Good hand washing habits can prevent the spread of influenza. Staff and children should wash their hands often, especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing their noses. Wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.



What to Do at Home

- Your child may need to stay at home and rest.
- Offer your child plenty of fluids to drink.
- Wash your hands and your child's hands after you wipe your child's nose. Make sure you wash your hands often and always before you prepare or eat food.
- Teach children to use a disposable tissue or to cover their mouths with a sleeve (not hands) when they sneeze or cough and to wash their hands after coughing or sneezing.
- **Do not give over-the-counter cough and cold medicines to a child under 6 years of age, unless your doctor tells you to.**
- Make sure children, aged 6 – 59 months, have their flu shot.
- Make sure your child gets pneumococcal vaccine, as part of routine childhood immunizations.



INFLUENZA is a vaccine-preventable disease

Everyone should get a flu shot every year. In BC, flu vaccine is provided free to all children 6-59 months of age. Many people qualify for free flu vaccine such as those at high risk for serious illness, and people of all ages who will be in close contact of someone high risk.

Talk to your health care provider to find out if you are eligible. If not, you can get one for a fee at your local pharmacy or the VHC travel clinic (604.736.9244). Some employers also provide free vaccines to their employees.

Facts about Influenza (Flu) continued



When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if your child has any of the following signs:

- has a temperature of 38.5°C or higher and is less than 6 months old
- is listless, not interested in playing or is unusually sleepy
- has trouble breathing, is wheezing or has chest pain when breathing
- coughs up bloody phlegm
- your child's throat is very sore
- drinks very little fluid and has not urinated at least every 6 hours when awake
- is vomiting for more than 4 hours or has severe diarrhea
- your child seems to get better and then gets worse after 2 or 3 days
- has any other signs of illness that concern you



Seek Medical Care

Take your child to the emergency department immediately or call 911 if your child:

- has severe trouble breathing, is wheezing or has chest pain when breathing
- is limp or unable to move
- is listless, hard to wake up or does not respond
- has a stiff neck
- is confused
- has a seizure (convulsion)



Children with influenza may go to school or the child care centre when they feel well enough to take part in activities.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™) or ibuprofen (Advil™, Motrin™) may help reduce a fever and provide some comfort. Always follow the directions on the package about how much and how often to take acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Never give products containing ASA (acetylsalicylic acid, such as Aspirin™) to anyone under the age of 20 years. Use of ASA products by children can lead to Reye's syndrome, a serious condition affecting the brain and liver.