

The flu: a guide for parents.

This year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever for everyone 6 months of age or older to get a flu shot.

What is the flu?

The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. They cause illnesses, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year. The flu can be very dangerous for children. Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.

How serious is the flu?

Flu illness can vary from mild to severe. While the flu can be serious even in people who are otherwise healthy, it can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age who have certain long-term health conditions, including asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders (such as diabetes), kidney, liver, and metabolic disorders, and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication. Children with these conditions and children who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy can have more severe illness from the flu.

How does the flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching something that has a flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea. Some people with the flu will not have a fever.

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

People with the flu may be able to infect others by shedding virus from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and might be still contagious past 5 to 7 days of being sick, especially if they still have symptoms.

Protect your child.

How can I protect my child against flu?

To protect against the flu, the first and most important thing you can do is to get a flu vaccine for yourself and your child.

- Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.
- It's especially important that young children and children with long-term health conditions get vaccinated. (See list of conditions under "How Serious is the Flu?")
- Caregivers of children with health conditions or of children younger than 6 months old should get vaccinated. (Babies younger than 6 months old are too young to be vaccinated themselves.)
- Another way to protect babies is to vaccinate pregnant women because research shows that this gives some protection to the baby both while the woman is pregnant and for a few months after the baby is born.

If your child is sick.

What can I do if my child gets sick?

If your child is 5 years or older and does not have other health problems and gets flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, keep your child at home and away from other family members as best you can and consult your doctor right away. Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids.

If your child is younger than 5 years (and especially younger than 2 years) or of any age with a long term health condition (like asthma, a neurological condition, or diabetes, for example) and develops flu-like symptoms, they are at risk for serious complications from the flu. Ask a doctor if your child should be examined.

What if my child seems very sick?

Even children who have always been healthy before (or had the flu before) can get very sick from the flu. Call 911 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

Can my child go to school, day care or camp if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children or caregivers.

When can my child go back to school after having the flu?

Keep your child home from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. (Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)

Flu and COVID-19 viruses share many of the same symptoms. If you or your child experience flu-like symptoms, avoid contact with others and contact your doctor right away to determine whether you need a COVID-19 test.

If you have a cell phone or computer, you can get advice at home by using Franciscan Virtual Urgent Care. Learn how at [chifranciscan.org/virtualcare](https://www.chifranciscan.org/virtualcare).



For more information about the flu or the vaccine, call **1 (800) CDC-INFO** or visit **www.flu.gov**



Information provide by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention