

Influenza (Flu) in Children: Care Instructions



Overview

Flu, also called influenza, is caused by a virus. Flu tends to come on more quickly and is usually worse than a cold. Your child may suddenly develop a fever, chills, body aches, a headache, and a cough. The fever, chills, and body aches can last for about a week. Your child may have a cough, a runny nose, and a sore throat for another week or more. Family members can get the flu from coughs or sneezes or by touching something that your child has coughed or sneezed on.

Most of the time, the flu does not need any medicine other than acetaminophen (Tylenol). But sometimes doctors prescribe antiviral medicines. If started within 2 days of your child getting the flu, these medicines can help prevent problems from the flu and help your child get better a day or two sooner than they would without the medicine.

Your doctor will not prescribe an antibiotic for the flu, because antibiotics do not work for viruses. But sometimes children get an ear infection or other bacterial infections with the flu. Antibiotics may be used in these cases.

Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.

How can you care for your child at home?

- Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) for fever, pain, or fussiness. Read and follow all instructions on the label. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 20. It has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.
- Be careful with cough and cold medicines. Don't give them to children younger than 6, because they don't work for children that age and can even be harmful. For children 6 and older, always follow all the instructions carefully. Make sure you know how much medicine to give and how long to use it. And use the dosing device if one is included.

- Be careful when giving your child over-the-counter cold or flu medicines and Tylenol at the same time. Many of these medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Read the labels to make sure that you are not giving your child more than the recommended dose. Too much Tylenol can be harmful.
- Have your child take medicines exactly as prescribed.
- Keep children home from school and other public places until they have had no fever for 24 hours. The fever needs to have gone away on its own without the help of medicine.
- If your child has problems breathing because of a stuffy nose, squirt a few saline (saltwater) nasal drops in one nostril. For older children, have them blow their nose. Repeat for the other nostril. For infants, put a drop or two in one nostril. Using a soft rubber suction bulb, squeeze air out of the bulb, and gently place the tip of the bulb inside the baby's nose. Relax your hand to suck the mucus from the nose. Repeat in the other nostril.
- Keep your child away from smoke. Do not smoke or let anyone else smoke in your house.
- Wash your hands and your child's hands often so you do not spread the flu.

When should you call for help?



Call 911 anytime you think your child may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- Your child has severe trouble breathing. Signs may include the chest sinking in, using belly muscles to breathe, or nostrils flaring while your child is struggling to breathe.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your child has a fever with a stiff neck or a severe headache.
- Your child is confused, does not know where they are, or is extremely sleepy or hard to wake up.
- Your child has trouble breathing, breathes very fast, or coughs all the time.
- Your child has a high fever.
- Your child has signs of needing more fluids. These signs include sunken eyes with few tears, dry mouth with little or no spit, and little or no urine for 6 hours.

Watch closely for changes in your child's health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your child has new symptoms, such as a rash, an earache, or a sore throat.
- Your child cannot keep down medicine or liquids.
- Your child is having a problem with a medicine.
- Your child does not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **A223** in the search box to learn more about "**Influenza (Flu) in Children: Care Instructions**".

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