



Frequently asked questions about

Caring for Infants and Children with the Flu

From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Is my child at higher risk for the flu?

Children are at higher risk for the flu because their immune systems are not fully developed. Children with chronic health conditions (i.e., heart disease, cancer, diabetes, asthma, etc.) are at even higher risk of getting the flu and experiencing complications.

- Children 6 months and older should get the flu vaccine.
- Children younger than 6 months cannot get the flu vaccine. Get vaccinated yourself and follow our prevention tips to keep them healthy.
- Parents and caregivers of children younger than 5 or with chronic health conditions should get the flu vaccine.
- If your child is younger than 5 or has any chronic health conditions and experiences flu-like symptoms, such as fever, sore throat, cough, runny/stuffy nose, head ache and body aches, fatigue, nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea, contact a health care provider as soon as possible.

Why are children at higher risk for getting the flu?

Children are more likely to get the flu or have flu-related complications because their immune systems are still developing. A recent CDC study shows that treating children with the flu can be costly. Each year in the U.S. an average of **20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized for flu-related complications**. During the 2011-12 flu season, 26 deaths in children were reported to CDC. Severe flu-related complications are most common in children younger than 2. Young children, 6 months to 5 years, are at risk of febrile seizures or convulsions. Children with chronic health conditions such as asthma and diabetes have an extremely high risk of developing serious flu-related complications.

How do I protect my child from the flu?

Vaccination is the best protection against the flu. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get the vaccine as soon as it becomes available. Vaccination is especially important for children:

- Between 6 months and 5 years old
- With a chronic health condition like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease

Some children between 6 months and 8 years old require two doses of flu vaccine. The second dose should be given at least 28 days after the first dose. Your child's health care provider can tell you whether two doses are recommended for your child.

If you need help paying for your child's flu vaccine, the Vaccines for Children program can provide assistance.

Because children are at an increased risk of getting pneumonia, a complication of the flu, talk to a health care provider about the pneumococcal vaccine. The pneumococcal vaccine will protect your child against pneumonia.

In addition, follow our everyday steps to keep your family healthy this flu season.

My child is younger than 6 months, what can I do to protect him or her from the flu?

The flu vaccine is **not** approved for infants younger than 6 months. Infants younger than 6 months are, however, at especially high risk of flu-related complications. The best way to protect your child is to follow our prevention guidelines and have caregivers and household members get the flu vaccine.

My child has the flu, how do I care for him or her?

If your child has flu-like symptoms and he or she is younger than 5 years old or has any chronic medical conditions, contact a health care provider as soon as possible. Your child's provider may want to prescribe antiviral medications to make your child's symptoms less severe and help him or her feel better faster. On December 21, 2012, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration expanded the approved use of Tamiflu to treat children as young as 2 weeks old who have shown symptoms of flu for no longer than two days. Tamiflu is the only product approved to treat flu infection in children younger than 1 year old.

Follow these special instructions, in addition to the recommendations in Caring for Someone with the Flu, when caring for children and infants with the flu:

- Do not give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) to children or teenagers who have the flu. Giving aspirin to children with the flu can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome. Read ingredient labels on over-the-counter medications carefully to ensure they do not contain aspirin.
- To safely treat children under 2, use a suction bulb to help clear mucus and a cool-mist humidifier to make breathing easier.
- Do not give children younger than 4 over-the-counter cold medicines without consulting a health care provider.
- Give children and teens 5 years and older cold medicines with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), to relieve symptoms.

When should I seek emergency medical assistance?

Seek medical attention immediately if your child:

- Is breathing fast or having trouble breathing
- Has a bluish skin color

- Is not drinking enough fluids
- Has severe or persistent vomiting
- Is not waking up or interacting
- Is irritable and does not want to be held
- Has flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Has other health conditions and develops flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough

In infants, watch for the signs above as well as:

- Inability to eat
- Trouble breathing
- No tears when crying
- Significantly fewer wet diapers than normal

My child has the flu. When can he or she go back to school or day care?

Keep your child at home and away from healthy people for at least 24 hours after his or her fever is gone. Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.

I am breastfeeding and have the flu. Should I continue breastfeeding?

If you are breastfeeding you should continue to nurse your baby while being treated for the flu. Breast milk passes antibodies from you to your baby. Antibodies help fight off infection.

- If possible, only adults who are not sick should care for infants, including providing feedings.
- If you are too sick to breastfeed, pump and have someone give your milk to your baby.
- Be careful not to cough or sneeze in the baby's face. Wash your hands often with soap and water.

For more information about communicable diseases and other important health information, visit us on the web:

www.bhsj.org

Or call your local Health Department office at:

Coldwater
279-9561 x 105

Hillsdale
437-7395 x 110

Three Rivers
273-2161 x 241