

Minnesota Department of Health

# Influenza (Flu) Information for Child Care Settings

What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza is a contagious respiratory disease that can be prevented by immunization. It is not the “stomach flu.” It is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms come on suddenly in the form of sore throat, headache, fever, extreme tiredness, dry cough, nasal congestion, and body aches. These symptoms can be severe and put you in bed for a number of days.

How is the flu different from a cold?

A cold generally stays in the head while the flu brings body aches, fever, and extreme fatigue. A child with a cold will usually keep up his or her normal activities. A child with the flu will often feel too sick to play. Also, symptoms of influenza usually come on very suddenly – a child will be okay one hour and ill the next hour.

How serious is influenza in children?

Unfortunately, we see complications of flu and flu-related deaths every year—including deaths and serious illness in children. Serious complications of influenza occur most often in the elderly, in people with chronic health conditions, and in children under 5 years of age.

Which children should get flu vaccine?

Flu vaccine is recommended for everyone over the age of 6 months. It is especially important for:

- Children 6 months to 5 years old
- All children with chronic diseases including:
  - Heart disease
  - Pulmonary disease, including asthma
  - Metabolic disease (diabetes)
  - Immune deficiency
  - Blood disorders
  - Long-term aspirin therapy

Should child care staff be vaccinated for flu?

Yes. Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. It is especially important for those who care for children including child care workers, parents, and other household contacts.

What about children under 6 months of age?

Children under 6 months of age are too young to receive influenza vaccine. However, to prevent the spread of the flu, close contacts and out-of-home caregivers should be vaccinated.

What other things can be done to keep flu from spreading?

- **Stay at home if you have flu-like symptoms.**  
Encourage parents to keep children at home if they have any symptoms of flu.
- Avoid exposing yourself to others who are sick with a flu-like illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze. And then throw the tissue away.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or with an alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer.
- Avoid sharing anything that goes into the mouth such as drinking cups and straws.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets, toys, table surfaces).

Child care kids and staff need flu vaccine!



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