

# Influenza

## Recommendations for Child Care Facilities

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Influenza or the flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu affects mainly the nose, throat, chest, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Flu can be very dangerous for children, but getting a flu vaccination each year helps protect children, parents, and staff from getting flu and reduce the risk of serious illness. Many of the steps you take to slow the spread of flu can also help to prevent other types of illness.

### The spread of influenza

Flu viruses mainly spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Students and staff may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

### Prevention in childcare facilities

- **Notify and educate parents.** Send an informational letter home to parents in September or October before influenza season and during outbreaks. Be sure to include symptoms of influenza, staying home when ill, and the importance of yearly influenza vaccines, especially for children with health problems like asthma.
- **Wash hands often.** Wash hands frequently using soap and warm water for 20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers, if possible. If cloth towels are used, they should be replaced with a clean towel after each use. Young children should be instructed and assisted to ensure proper hand washing. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and towels are available.
- **Use hand sanitizer.** Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not possible. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. (e.g., contact with phone, child's nose, and doorknob). **Throw away tissues.** Make sure tissues are available in the day-care business and transport vehicles. Staff and children should cover their mouth with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed.
- **Wash after wiping noses.** Proper hand washing is particularly important after wiping your own or someone else's nose, or after contact with drool, saliva or nose drainage.
- **Remind children not to touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way.
- **Avoid close contact.** All children and staff should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, toothbrushes, and toys.
- **Clean frequently and appropriately.** Frequently clean commonly used surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, toys, and phones.

- **Stay home when sick.** Any staff or child suspected of having influenza should not attend childcare until at least 24 hours after fever has resolved with the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- **Keep your business open if possible.** Closing a childcare business in the event of an outbreak is usually not recommended. If a center closes parents are more likely to take sick and well children to other centers, which spreads the illness to other centers.

### **Who should be vaccinated?**

Yearly flu vaccination is recommended for almost everyone over 6 months of age, and is especially important for those people at high risk for developing flu-related complications, such as children younger than five, adults 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, and people with certain medical conditions like heart and lung problems, or diabetes.

### **If you get sick**

Most healthy people recover from the flu without complications. If you get the flu:

- Stay home
- Get lots of rest and water
- Over-the-counter medications may relieve symptoms of the flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever)
- Remember that serious illness from the flu is more likely in certain groups of people including people 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic condition and young children
- Consult your health care provider early for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention

### **Emergency warning signs of influenza**

In **children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- 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
- Fever with a rash

#### **Contact information:**

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