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## INFLUENZA (THE "FLU")

Influenza (in-flu-EN-za), also known as "the flu," is an illness caused by a virus. A child who has the flu may have some or all of these symptoms:

- High fever
- Headache
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea

In some people, the flu may lead to sinus or ear infections, pneumonia, or dehydration (being "dried out"). People who have long-term illnesses like diabetes, heart or lung problems, may have a worsening of their diabetes, heart, or lung disease when they have influenza.



**Picture 1** Never give aspirin if you think your child has the flu.

### DIAGNOSIS

The doctor or nurse will examine your child and take a medical history. Sometimes a *nasal washing* is done to determine if your child has influenza or some other illness. A few drops of saline (salt water) are put into the child's nose. The saline clears some of the mucus from inside the nose. This mucus is collected in a clean cup. The sample is then sent to the lab and checked for influenza or other viruses.

### TREATMENT

Antibiotic medicines will not work against the virus that causes influenza. However, your child's doctor may prescribe new antiviral medicines to treat influenza or antibiotics to treat some of the bacterial complications of influenza. If your child has pain or fever, you may also give Tylenol (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen. **Do not give your child aspirin! Do not give ibuprofen (Motrin) to children younger than 6 months.**

### HOW FLU SPREADS

The flu virus spreads in droplets that spray through the air when a person coughs, sneezes, or even laughs. The virus gets into the mouth or nose of other people nearby (within 3 feet) or onto surfaces such as tables, desks, phones, pencils, etc. When other people touch these things, the virus can spread from their hands into their eyes, nose or mouth. The flu virus can live on some surfaces such as toys and countertops up to 2 days. A person can infect others even before symptoms appear (as much as a day before), and for at least seven days after getting sick.

## WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your child’s doctor if any of the following occurs:

- High fever (over 101°F by mouth, or 102°F rectally) that lasts more than 12 hours. (For infants 3 months and younger, call if rectal temperature is 100.5°F.
- Signs of dehydration (being “dried out”). These signs include dry lips, fewer wet diapers, not drinking. See the Helping Hand, *Dehydration: Giving Liquids at Home*, HH-I-207.
- Trouble breathing
- Little or no appetite
- Any other symptoms that do not go away or get worse.

## HOW TO PREVENT THE FLU

Influenza (Flu) Vaccine - see the Helping Hand, *Influenza: Who Should Get the Flu Vaccine?*, HH-I-246. In addition, there are many things you and your child can do to keep from getting the flu:

1. Good hand washing is VERY important! Clean your hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand wipes or gel hand cleaner. When using alcohol gel hand cleaner, rub hands together until the gel is dry. If using soap and warm water, wash for 15 to 20 seconds (about the same amount of time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice). Refer to the Helping Hand, *Hand Hygiene*, HH-IV-80.
2. Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. If you don’t have a tissue, sneeze or cough into an object or piece of clothing that can be thrown away or cleaned very well.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth whenever possible.
4. Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
5. Stay home when you are sick, unless you are going to the doctor or hospital. Avoid contact with others.
6. Do not share eating utensils (spoons, etc.), drinking glasses, or other personal items.
7. Practice good health habits: Eat a balanced diet, drink plenty of water, and get enough rest to keep your immune system strong.



**Picture 2** Practice good hand hygiene!

## WHEN YOU ARE AT THE DOCTOR’S OFFICE, CLINIC, OR HOSPITAL

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and throw away the used tissue in the wastebasket.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- You may also be asked to wear a mask to protect others if you have flu symptoms.
- Don’t worry if you see staff and others wearing masks. They are preventing the spread of germs.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse.