

# Influenza (the flu)

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- Because you or your child may have been exposed to influenza, or the flu.
  - For informational purposes only.
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## General Information About the Flu

### What is the flu?

- The flu is a respiratory, or breathing, illness caused by influenza viruses.
- It can spread easily.
- It is different from a cold.
- It is most common in the fall and winter.
- While most people recover at home, for some people (including infants and older adults) the flu can be serious.

### Who can get it?

- Anyone can get the flu, even if they've had it before.
- Some groups are at higher risk for getting very sick or developing medical problems, including:
  - Infants and children under 5 years
  - People over 50 years
  - Pregnant people
  - People with chronic health problems
- **People in a higher risk group (see above) should contact their healthcare provider if they think they've been exposed to, or have, the flu.**

### What are the symptoms?

- Fever (American Academy of Pediatrics defines fever as a temperature of 100.4°F [38°C] or higher)
- Headache
- Unusually tired, low activity level
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Nausea or vomiting

### How is it spread?

- The virus is found in droplets from coughs, sneezes, drool, and runny noses.
- The virus can spread when a person who has the flu coughs or sneezes and another person breathes in the droplets.
- It can also spread by:

- touching an object or surface that has the flu virus on it and then touching the mouth, eyes, or nose.
- sharing utensils or cups with someone who has the flu.

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## How Do I Know If My Child Has the Flu?

- A healthcare provider can typically diagnose flu based on a person's symptoms.
- There are tests available to detect flu. Talk with your healthcare provider for more information.

**If you have additional questions or believe your child has the flu, contact your healthcare provider. This fact sheet provides general information only.**

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## What If My Child Has the Flu?

**Notify your child care provider or preschool immediately if your child has the flu.**

### How is it treated?

- Antiviral medications may be prescribed to treat influenza, particularly for people who are very sick or are at higher risk for developing medical problems. Contact your healthcare provider if you think someone in your family has the flu.
- Keep children comfortable, allow them to rest, make sure they drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration, and check on them often.
- Infants 3 months or younger with a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher should be seen by their healthcare provider.
- Talk with your child's healthcare provider if you have any concerns about your child's symptoms. **If your child is showing signs of dehydration (fewer wet diapers or less urine than usual, more tired than normal, dizziness, dry tongue or lips, fewer tears), is breathing fast, is having trouble breathing, or has a severe headache, they need to be seen by a healthcare provider immediately.**

### How can I help prevent the flu from spreading?

- Get a flu vaccination every year. The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.
- Stay home when sick.
- Wash hands often, especially after sneezing, coughing, or wiping noses.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.
- Avoid sharing cups, eating utensils, food, and drinks with anyone who has the flu.
- Thoroughly clean toys and other objects children put into their mouths with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect household surfaces.

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## Does My Child Need to Stay Home from Child Care?

**No.** Children who have been exposed to, or have been diagnosed with, the flu can continue to attend child care **unless**:

- They have a fever (temperature of 100.4°F [38°C] or higher) along with other flu symptoms.

- They do not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities (for example: unusually tired; cranky or fussy; or crying more than normal).

**Please follow your child care program's sickness policy.**

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**References:**

American Academy of Pediatrics

- *Caring for our Children, Chapter 3 Health Promotion and Protection, 3.6 Management of Illness, 3.6.1 Inclusion/Exclusion Due to Illness*
- *Caring for our Children, Chapter 7 Infectious Diseases, 7.3 Respiratory Tract Infections, 7.3.3 Influenza, 7.3.3.2: Influenza Control*
- *Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 5th Edition. Pages 113-114*

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

- *Influenza (flu)*. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

Child Care Health Program – Public Health Seattle & King County

- <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/child-teen-health/child-care-health/disease-prevention.aspx>.  
*Disease Prevention Website*