

## Controlling Influenza Among Children: A 1-2-3 Approach

With flu season here, many parents across the country are finding themselves caring for children who are sick with influenza. Children are two to three times more likely than adults to get sick with the flu, and on average, one in three children in the U.S. is affected by the virus each year. The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) is working to educate parents about how they can keep their children healthy this flu season. Following is a simple three-step approach to flu prevention.

- 1. Vaccination:** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the best way to prevent flu is to get a vaccine. While October and November are the best times to get a flu vaccine, it's never too late to get vaccinated. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to become fully effective. There is plenty of vaccine still available, according to the CDC.
- 2. Antiviral Medication:** Prescription antiviral medication is an important adjunct to vaccination for flu prevention and treatment. If a child has been around someone who has the flu, a doctor can prescribe antiviral medication to help prevent the child from catching the virus. However, it's important to contact the doctor fast, because children should begin taking the medication within the first 12-48 hours of exposure to the virus. If taken within that window of time, there is an 89 percent chance that antiviral medication will keep him/her from getting sick. A doctor can also prescribe antivirals to treat the flu, helping both adults and children feel better faster.
- 3. Good Hygiene:** Practicing good hygiene habits is a great way to help control the spread of germs like the flu virus. Parents should teach their children healthy habits such as:
  - Washing their hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
  - Covering their mouths and noses with tissues when sneezing and coughing
  - Avoid sharing drinks, water bottles, silverware and pencils

The CDC suggests that parents disinfect objects frequently-touched by children, such as toys. Parents should also keep children who have influenza at home. For more information, see the fact sheet "When Sickness Strikes."

Teachers, staff, and parents can help slow the spread of flu by serving as role models for good hygiene practices.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE INFLUENZA VIRUS, VISIT [WWW.CDC.GOV/FLU](http://WWW.CDC.GOV/FLU)

This program is sponsored by the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) and supported by an educational grant from Roche.

# THE FLU: WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW TO KEEP KIDS HEALTHY

With flu season upon us, it is important that we work together to keep our children and school healthy. By keeping our children flu-free, we benefit the community as a whole. Additionally, healthy students miss fewer days of school, which results in less stress on the family. Following are answers to frequently asked questions about the flu and how to help protect your child.



## WHAT IS THE FLU?

- The flu is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the lungs, nose and throat
- Flu can cause mild to severe illness, and sometimes, can lead to death
- Each year in the United States:
  - 5-20 percent of Americans fall ill to the flu
  - Children are two to three times more likely than adults to get sick with the flu, and they frequently spread the virus to others
- Young children are at the greatest risk for developing serious flu complications, as well as the elderly and those with certain health conditions

## HOW DOES FLU SPREAD?

- There are two ways to get the flu. Usually flu is spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing. Occasionally, people can get the flu from touching a germ-infested surface

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON SYMPTOMS OF FLU?

Often we get confused about the symptoms of the flu and how they are different from a common cold. Knowing the symptoms of the flu is important and will help you act quickly to get your child feeling better faster

- Common symptoms of flu include: high fever, severe headache, muscle and body aches, exhaustion and dry cough
  - Children often have additional flu symptoms that are rare in adults, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Symptoms of a common cold include: stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat and hacking cough

## SIMPLE STEPS FOR KEEPING YOUR CHILD HEALTHY

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the best way to prevent your child from getting the flu is to take him/her to get a flu vaccine
- You should talk to your child about practicing good health habits, such as:
  - Washing hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
  - Covering mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, and disposing of the tissue in a proper trash receptacle
  - Avoiding sharing drinks, water bottles or silverware with others
- You can help prevent the flu from spreading at home by disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, toys and other commonly shared items
- Also, if someone in your household gets the flu, a doctor can prescribe a medication – called an antiviral – that can actually prevent other members of the household from catching the flu
  - Studies show that some antiviral medications are up to 89 percent effective in preventing the flu when taken once daily for seven days

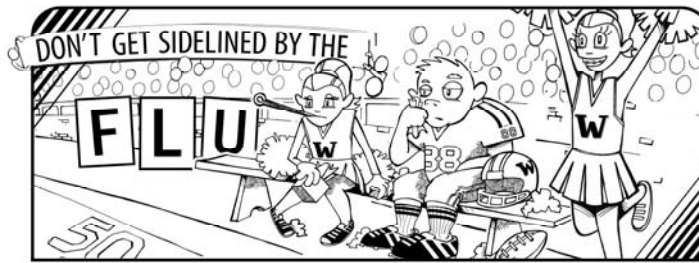
## DON'T TAKE THE FLU LYING DOWN

- If you are concerned about your child's flu symptoms, call your doctor early. Call your doctor immediately if your child has a chronic disease. Some children may benefit from an antiviral medication, which can be prescribed by a physician and can help lessen the duration of the virus and reduce the risk of complications, such as pneumonia
  - To be effective, antiviral medication should be taken within 12-48 hours after flu symptoms begin
- If your child has the flu, it is important for them to stay home from school, rest, and drink plenty of fluids
- Additionally, notify the school nurse **[INSERT NAME AND NUMBER]** if your child has the flu. Monitoring flu incidence at **[INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL]** will help keep students, faculty and our community health



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## WHEN SICKNESS STRIKES: Know When to Keep a Child Home From School

A parent's decision to keep a child home from school when he or she is sick can sometimes be a difficult one. No parent wants to interrupt their child's learning, and for some, keeping a child home means missing work or losing pay. However, if he or she has a serious illness such as influenza, it's important for the child to stay home from school. By taking this step, parents can help their children get better faster as well as prevent the spread of illness to others. Following are some frequently-asked questions and answers to aid parents in decision making this flu season.

**Q: Should I keep my child home from school if he or she has cold or flu symptoms? Is your advice different for cold versus the flu?**

**A: If your child has flu symptoms, you should keep him or her home from school. If your child has a cold, the decision to keep him or her home may depend on the severity of symptoms.** A good rule of thumb is to keep your child home if he or she has a fever of 100 degrees or higher.

**It's also important to know the difference between cold and flu.** Flu is a serious illness, and children who have the flu should always stay home from school. Flu symptoms include fever, along with chills, cough, sore throat, headache or muscle aches. Many people describe it "like being hit by a truck." It is a good idea to contact the child's doctor if he or she has these symptoms. Symptoms of a common cold include stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat and hacking cough. Often, cold symptoms come on gradually. Although the common cold is usually not serious, if the symptoms are severe, it's a good idea to keep your child home to rest and get better.

**Q: If my child does have the flu or a bad cold, how long should I keep him or her home from school?**

**A: Parents should keep their sick children home from school until they have been without fever (temperature under 100 degrees) for 24 hours, to prevent spreading illness to others.** Flu is spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing. Occasionally, people can get the flu from touching a germ-infested surface. Children are one of the biggest sources of flu spread.

**Q: Should I call the doctor if I think my child has the flu?**

**A: If a child experiences flu symptoms, parents should contact their child's doctor quickly.** Some children may benefit from an antiviral medication, which can be prescribed by a doctor and can help lessen the number of days that a child is sick with the virus. To be effective, antiviral medication should be taken within 12-48 hours after flu symptoms begin.

**Q: What should I do to help prevent the rest of the household from getting sick?**

**A: Teach and practice healthy habits.** Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds to help prevent germs from spreading. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, because the virus can spread when your hands touch surfaces that are infested with germs. Also, **consider contacting your doctor** if someone in your household gets the flu. A doctor can prescribe antiviral medication that can actually prevent other members of the household from catching the virus.

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