

Information for parents on children and influenza

What is Influenza?

Influenza, commonly called 'the flu', is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus.

What are the symptoms in children?

Flu in children usually causes at least two or three of the following symptoms:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Headache
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Aches and pains
- Lack of energy
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Noisy breathing (croup)

Contact a doctor if:

Your child has any of these symptoms AND

- Is under one year old
 - Was born prematurely and is now less than two years old
 - Has been in hospital within the last three months
 - Needs to see a doctor often, for example, for:
 - Chronic heart disease
 - Cystic fibrosis or other chronic lung condition
 - Asthma
 - Diabetes
 - Organ transplantation (kidney, liver, lung, heart)
 - Cancer or leukaemia
 - Develops a rash
 - Becomes more drowsy than usual
 - Has trouble feeding
 - Develops noisy breathing or breathing difficulties
 - Complains of pains in the chest
- You do **not** need to seek urgent assessment if the child has just a runny nose and no fever.

How long does the flu last?

Most symptoms resolve within about a week, although the cough may persist longer.

How does it spread?

Flu is very infectious. It can spread:

- through the air, by coughing, sneezing, and
- on hands, cups, cutlery, handkerchiefs, or other objects that have been in contact with the mouth and nose.

Adults and children are infectious probably just before the onset of symptoms, and for between 1 and 7 days after the symptoms appear.

What can you do for the child with flu?

- Do not send your child to school or day care
- Encourage your child to drink more
- Use paracetamol for pain or discomfort
- Continue usual medications (for example, for asthma or diabetes) and follow the management plan for these conditions
- Do NOT give aspirin
- Antibiotics do NOT work against viruses, and are NOT effective against flu.

What can you do to prevent others catching flu?

- If your child has a chronic medical condition, it is recommended they have an annual flu vaccination – see your doctor.
- Do not send your child to child care
- Do not send your child to school
- Do not share eating or drinking utensils (for example cups, cutlery)
- Where possible, minimise close contact with healthy friends and family
- Practise good hygiene.

Flu in babies less than 12 months.

Is your baby seriously ill?

Check for:

Arousal, Alertness and Activity

Your baby could be seriously ill if it is:

- More drowsy than usual, can't wake properly, doesn't respond to you normally, and is less active. The more drowsy, the more likely the illness is serious. Periods of normal activity and alertness are a good sign.

Breathing difficulty

Your baby could be seriously ill if it has:

- A heaving chest, drawing in its ribs and breast bone, or grunting with breathing.

Circulation

Your baby could be seriously ill if it:

- Suddenly becomes pale all over, or its legs feel cold up to the knees.

Feeding

Your baby could be seriously ill if it:

- Feeds less than half the normal amount over 24 hours. If your baby is breast fed, keep note over 24 hours of how often it feeds and for how long. If bottle fed, add up the volume of milk taken over 24 hours and compare it to your baby's normal intake.

Urine output

Your baby could be seriously ill if it:

- Has less than 4 wet nappies per 24 hours, in a baby under 6 months of age.

If you note any of the above contact your doctor immediately.

Further information

www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/fact_sheets/influenza

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au