

# INFLUENZA

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## DEFINITION

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi that occurs in epidemics every 3 or 4 years (e.g., Asian influenza). The main symptoms are a stuffy nose, sore throat, and nagging cough. There may be more muscle pain, headache, fever, and chills than with usual colds. For most people, influenza is just a "bad cold" and bed rest is not necessary. The dangers of influenza for healthy people are overrated.

## HOME CARE

The treatment of influenza depends on the child's main symptoms and is no different from the treatment for other viral respiratory infections. Bed rest is unnecessary.

**Fever or Aches.** Use acetaminophen every 6 hours or ibuprofen every 8 hours. Aspirin should be avoided in children and adolescents with suspected influenza because of the possible link with Reye's syndrome.

**Cough or Hoarseness.** Give your child cough drops if over 4 years old. If your child is younger than 4 years old, give corn syrup  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 teaspoon as needed.

**Sore Throat.** A soft diet will help. For children over age 1, offer sips of warm chicken broth. Children over age 4 can suck on hard candy.

**Stuffy Nose.** Warm-water or saline nose drops followed by suction (or nose blowing) will open most blocked noses. Use nasal washes at least 4 times per day or whenever your child can't breathe through the

nose. Saline nose drops are made by adding  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of salt to 1 cup of warm water.

**Contagiousness.** Spread is rapid because the incubation period is only 24 to 36 hours and the virus is very contagious. Therefore, your child may return to day care or school after the fever is gone and she feels up to it.



## CALL OUR OFFICE

### IMMEDIATELY if

- Your child is having difficulty with breathing.
- Your child starts to act very sick.

### During regular hours if

- An earache or sinus pain occurs.
- A fever lasts over 3 days.
- You have other questions or concerns.

## INFLUENZA VACCINE AND PREVENTION

Influenza vaccine gives protection for only 1 or 2 years. In addition, the vaccine itself can cause fever in 20% of all people and a sore injection site in 10%. Therefore the vaccine is not recommended for healthy children (unless an especially severe form of influenza comes along). Only children with chronic diseases (e.g., asthma) need to have yearly influenza boosters. Talk about this with your physician if you think your child should have flu shots.