



Preventing the Flu in 2007-2008

Strategies and Resources for Child Care Providers and Out-of-Home Caregivers of Children

Influenza, known more commonly as "the flu," is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, and lungs). Unlike the common cold, the flu can cause severe illness and life threatening complications in many people. In an average year, the flu causes 36,000 deaths and 200,000 hospitalizations. Because the flu virus changes from year to year, annual vaccination against the flu is recommended. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May and does not usually peak until late December through March. Additional information on the flu and flu vaccine is available at www.cispimmunize.org.

Recent studies have shown that children younger than 5 years old — even previously healthy children — are more likely than older children to end up in the hospital with serious complications if they get the flu. These complications can include pneumonia (an illness in which the lungs get infected and inflamed), dehydration (when a child is too sick to drink enough fluids and her body loses too much water), worsening of medical problems like heart disease or asthma, encephalopathy (a disease of the brain), sinus problems, and ear infections. In rare cases, complications from the flu can lead to death. In addition, children in group settings have high hand-to-mouth activity, play and eat close together, and can easily pass germs to each other, to caregivers, to family members, or to others in the community.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all children 6 to 59 months old get a flu shot. (Flu shots are not approved for use in children younger than 6 months old.) Also, those who have contact with children younger than 5 years old should get vaccinated. This includes women who are pregnant, household contacts, and out-of-home caregivers. This is particularly important for contacts of children younger than 6 months of age, because children less than 6 months old cannot be vaccinated themselves and cannot be given antiviral medications to treat the flu. Children receiving the flu vaccine for the first time between the ages of 6 months and 8 years need 2 doses, 4 weeks apart. If a child received only 1 dose in her first year of vaccination, 2 doses should be administered during the second year.

This Year's Influenza Vaccine Supply

More than 100 million doses of the flu vaccine are expected to be available during the 2007-2008 flu season. Currently no supply problems are being reported, but distribution delays or supply shortages are still possible throughout the season.

The CDC will monitor the flu vaccine supply throughout the season. In the case of a shortage, local health officials will work with the CDC to decide who should receive vaccines first. Visit http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/vax_priority.htm for more detailed information.

The AAP encourages parents to contact their pediatrician's office in early October to see when they recommend children get vaccinated. Do not delay in getting the vaccine as soon as it is available. Children still benefit greatly from receiving the vaccine into December, January and beyond.

Advice for Child Care Providers and Out-of-Home Caregivers

Get Vaccinated

If you live with or care for a child younger than 5 years old, the CDC recommends that you receive a flu vaccination. There are 2 types of flu vaccines:

- The "flu shot" — an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle — is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu virus — is approved for use in healthy people, 5-49 years of age, who are not pregnant. (However, please note that the FDA recently approved this vaccine for use in children beginning at age 2. Although the CDC hasn't yet come forth with a recommendation, there may be some communities using this vaccine with younger children this flu season.)

The time between the first exposure to the virus and the first sign of symptoms is about 1-3 days. The contagious period is from the day before signs/symptoms appear until 7 days after the onset of the flu. The ability of the flu vaccine to protect a person depends on the age and health status of the person getting the vaccine, and the similarity or "match" between the virus strains in the vaccine and those in circulation. Testing has shown that both vaccines are effective at preventing the flu.

Possible Vaccine Side Effects: Different side effects can be associated with the flu shot and the nasal spray. Some minor side effects that could occur are: soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given, low-grade fever, and aches. If these problems occur, they typically begin soon after the shot and usually last 1 to 2 days. The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Other possible side effects with the nasal spray include cold-like symptoms, such as headache, cough, sore throat, tiredness/weakness, irritability, and muscle aches. Most people who get the flu vaccine do not experience serious side effects. Rarely, a vaccine may cause serious problems, such as a severe allergic reaction.

People should NOT be vaccinated with the flu shot or nasal-spray if they:

- Are less than 6 months of age (flu shot); less than 5 or older than 49 (nasal-spray)
- Have moderate to severe febrile illness
- Have a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome, hypersensitivity, including anaphylaxis, to eggs, to any previous influenza vaccine dose, or to any of its components.

Additionally, people should NOT be given the nasal-spray if they:

- Have asthma, reactive airway disease, or other chronic disorders of the lungs or cardiovascular systems
- Have underlying medical conditions, including metabolic diseases, such as diabetes, renal dysfunction, and hemoglobinopathies
- Received other live vaccines within the last 4 weeks
- Have known or suspected immunodeficiency disease, or receiving immunosuppressive therapies
- Take aspirin

Practice Good Health Habits

Certain good health habits can help prevent the spread of illnesses like the flu. Protect yourself and the children in your care by following these steps:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough/sneeze — throw the used tissue away.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, and as soon as possible after you cough/sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Keep yourself and any babies or children in your care away from people who are coughing or sneezing, as much as you can.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth since germs can spread this way.

Advice for Caregivers Who Get the Flu

If you live with or care for a child younger than 5 years old, follow the precautions below to help prevent the spread of illness.

Remember How the Flu Spreads

The main way that the flu spreads is in respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and infect someone nearby. Though much less frequent, the flu may also spread through indirect contact with contaminated hands and articles soiled with nose and throat secretions.

Follow These Steps

If you get flu-like symptoms, which can include a fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, or body aches* follow the precautions below:

- Check with your health care provider. (If you have the flu, your doctor may prescribe antiviral medications for you.)
- If you work in an early education/child care program, do not go to work if you are sick.
- Try to minimize contact with children as much as possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough/sneeze — throw the used tissue away.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and as soon as possible after you cough/sneeze. If you are not near water use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Take these precautions for the first 5 days of illness (beginning the first day you notice symptoms).

*Note: these symptoms alone or with fever often are caused by other factors, such as the common cold, not the flu virus. Individuals need not minimize contact with children when suffering from the common cold.

Important Information About Children with Influenza

Excluding children from child care or other group settings is not necessary unless:

- The child is unable to participate in planned activities and staff determine they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.
- The child meets other exclusion criteria, such as fever with behavior changes.

Children can return to child care when exclusion criteria are resolved (i.e., the child is able to participate, and staff determine they can care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group). For more information, see the AAP manual, *Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools: A Quick Reference Guide*.

Ask the Doctor About Antiviral Medication

Some antiviral drugs are approved to prevent the flu. These are prescription medications, and a doctor should be consulted before they are used. Currently the CDC recommends that neither the antivirals amantadine nor rimantadine be used to treat or prevent the flu in the United States. Oseltamivir or zanamivir may be prescribed if an antiviral medication is indicated for the treatment of the flu, or oseltamivir may be prescribed for prevention of the flu.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: SMOKING AND INFLUENZA

Some studies show that people who smoke are more likely to get the flu, and there is a higher mortality rate from the flu among smokers than among nonsmokers. If you smoke or spend time with someone who smokes - get vaccinated. Secondhand smoke is a known cause of respiratory problems, ear infections, asthma attacks, and even sudden infant death syndrome in infants and children. While many smokers open a window while in a car or smoke in another room at home, there is absolutely NO safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Bottom Line: Get immunized and don't smoke around children!

Influenza Resources for Child Care Providers and Out-of-Home Caregivers

Influenza Guidance

For the recommended childhood immunization schedule and information on the flu vaccine, go to <http://www.aap.org/> and <http://www.cispimmunize.org>. See <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/> for a variety of relevant resources. Check with <http://www.cispimmunize.org/pro/influenzaguidance.html> for any updates on supply or distribution delays.

Patient Screening Form – Do I Need Any Vaccinations Today?

Adults need shots, too! It is important that adults at highest risk of serious illness or death from the flu, those in close contact with children, or others in high-risk populations get a flu shot. Review this form to determine if you should get a flu shot: www.immunize.org/catg.d/4036need.pdf

Child Care Materials

Child care providers can take steps to prevent the spread of infectious diseases like the flu. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (NRC) offers the latest resources in child care to out-of-home child care providers and parents. Available at: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/>

The site also offers an online version of *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care, 2nd Edition*, which provides specific guidelines and recommendations regarding promoting immunization and preventing the spread of disease. Available at: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/index.html>

Healthy Kids, Healthy Care: This Web site is a parent-friendly tool on health and safety issues in child care, created by the NRC based on *Caring for Our Children*. Website: www.healthykids.us/. A print version is also available from the National Resource Center and the AAP.

Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools: A Quick Reference Guide, presents information on preventing, identifying, and responding to infectious disease in child care and schools. To order, visit www.healthychildcare.org/

School Materials and Posters

Educators, staff, and parents can help slow the spread of colds and flu. The CDC offers information on preventing the flu, as well as, materials and tools for schools. Available at: www.cdc.gov/flu/school/

For direct questions regarding the flu, or flu vaccine, ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information. Additional resources include calling your local or state health department or contacting the CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit: www.cdc.gov/flu.

For additional immunization information, visit these AAP Web sites:

Childhood Immunization Support Program
www.cispimmunize.org

Early Education and Child Care Initiatives
www.healthychildcare.org

