

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
State Surgeon General and Secretary

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

Dear Parents:

The Florida Department of Health (The Department) reports that influenza, or "flu," activity levels have increased sharply over the last several weeks. Flu is a contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. Some people, such as young children, the elderly, and people with certain health conditions are at high risk for serious complication from flu. The Department is encouraging families to get vaccinated for flu now.

Vaccination is the best way to protect against the flu and severe complications from the flu. Vaccination is most crucial for children with underlying health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions. The flu vaccine is offered in many locations including pharmacies, clinics, employers, and schools. Contact your health care provider, county health department, or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/findaflushot> to find a flu vaccine center near you.

The flu vaccine is safe. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all individuals six months of age and older receive the flu vaccine each year. Since infants under six months of age are too young to get vaccinated against influenza, it is important that family members (including pregnant or breastfeeding mothers) and other caregivers for these children be vaccinated to help protect them from the disease.

It is especially important that parents keep sick children at home to prevent spreading the flu virus to others. Additional flu prevention steps include staying away from people who are sick, covering sneezes or coughs with a tissue or your elbow, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and frequent hand washing.

If your child becomes sick with flu-like illness, contact your health care provider as soon after symptoms begin as possible. Symptoms of the flu often include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches, or fatigue. Antiviral medication for flu has been shown to reduce severity and length of disease, decrease the risk of complications from influenza, and reduce the risk of death among hospitalized patients, particularly in those that start treatment early in their illness. Health care providers can prescribe antiviral treatment if appropriate. Treatment is most effective when started within 48 hours, so contacting your healthcare provider as soon as your child becomes ill is important, especially if your child has underlying health conditions.

The best way to keep yourself and your family safe and healthy during flu season is to:

- Get vaccinated;
- Keep sick family members home;
- Contact your health care provider if you or your child are experiencing flu-like symptoms, and
- Follow your doctor's guidance on treatment.

For more information, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/parents/index.htm>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Paula Thaqi MD".

Paula Thaqi, MD, MPH



The Flu:

A Guide For Parents

FLU INFORMATION

What is the flu?

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. Flu viruses cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year.

The flu can be very dangerous for children. Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.

How serious is the flu?

Flu illness can vary from mild to severe. While the flu can be serious even in people who are otherwise healthy, it can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age who have certain long-term health conditions, including asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders (such as diabetes), kidney, liver, and metabolic disorders, and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication.



U.S. Department of
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www.broward.floridahealth.gov



Children with these conditions and children who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy can have severe illness from the flu.

How does the flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching something that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults). Some people with the flu will not have a fever.

How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People with the flu may be able to infect others by shedding virus from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and may be still contagious past 5 to 7 days of flu illness, especially if they still have symptoms.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD

How can I protect my child against the flu?

To protect against the flu, the first and most important thing you can do is to get a flu vaccine for yourself and your child.

- ▶ Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.
- ▶ It's especially important that young children and children with long term health conditions get vaccinated. (See list of conditions in "How serious is the flu?")
- ▶ Caregivers of children with health conditions or of children younger than 6 months old should get vaccinated. (Babies younger than 6 months are too young to be vaccinated themselves.)
- ▶ Another way to protect babies is to vaccinate pregnant women. Research shows that flu vaccination gives some protection to the baby both while the woman is pregnant and for up to 6 months after the baby is born.

Flu vaccine is updated annually to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the upcoming flu season. Flu vaccines are made using strict safety and production measures. Over the years, millions of flu vaccines have been given in the United States with a very good safety record.

Is there a medicine to treat the flu?

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that can be used to treat and prevent influenza illness. They can make people feel better and get better sooner. Antivirals can mean the difference between having milder illness instead of very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay. Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics, which fight against bacterial infections. They work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. It's very important that antiviral drugs are used early to treat the flu in people who are very sick (for example, people who are in the hospital) or who are at high risk of having serious flu complications. Other people with flu illness may also benefit from taking antiviral drugs. These drugs can be given to children and pregnant women.

What are some of the other ways I can protect my child against the flu?

In addition to getting vaccinated, you and your children can take everyday steps to help prevent the spread of germs.

These include:

- ▶ Stay away from people who are sick.
- ▶ If your child is sick with flu-like illness, try to keep him or her in a separate room from others in the household, if possible.
- ▶ CDC recommends that your sick child stay home for at least 24 hours after his or her fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- ▶ Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after it has been used.
- ▶ Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- ▶ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- ▶ Clean and disinfect hard surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs, including bathroom surfaces, kitchen counters and toys for children. Clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant

according to directions on the product label.

These everyday steps are a good way to reduce your chances of getting sick. However, a yearly flu vaccine is the best protection against flu illness.



IF YOUR CHILD IS SICK

What can I do if my child gets sick?

Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child's illness.

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids. If your child is 5 years and older and does not have other health problems and gets flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed.

Children younger than 5 years of age – especially those younger than 2 years old – and children with certain chronic conditions, including asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system, at high risk of serious flu-related complications. If your child is at high risk for flu complications, call your doctor or take them to the doctor right away if they develop flu-like symptoms.

What if my child seems very sick?

Even previously healthy children can get very sick from the flu.

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids. If your child is 5 years or older and does not have other health problems and gets flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed:

- ▶ Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- ▶ Bluish or gray skin color
- ▶ Not drinking enough fluids (not going to the bathroom or not making as much urine as they normally do)
- ▶ Severe or persistent vomiting
- ▶ Not waking up or not interacting
- ▶ Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- ▶ Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- ▶ Has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu symptoms, including a fever and/or cough.

Can my child go to school, day care or camp if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children or caregivers.

When can my child go back to school after having the flu?

Keep your child home from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. (The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) A fever is defined as 100°F (37.8°C) or higher.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu or www.flu.gov or call 800-CDC-INFO