

Fact Sheet

Influenza

Recommendations for Child Care Facilities

What is influenza?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Influenza is a highly contagious virus that affects mainly the nose, throat, chest, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

The Spread of Influenza

Flu viruses mainly spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

Infectious Period

People may be able to infect each other one day before symptoms occur and up to 10 days after being sick.

Prevention in Child Care Facilities

- **Stay home when sick.** Any staff or child suspected of having influenza should not attend child care.
- **Wash hands often.** Wash hands frequently using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers, if possible. If cloth towels are used, replace them with clean towels several times a day. Each child should have their own cloth towel. Young children should be instructed and assisted to ensure proper hand washing. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and towels are available.
- **Wash after wiping noses.** Proper hand washing is particularly important after wiping your own or someone else's nose, or after contact with drool, saliva or nose drainage.
- Influenza can be spread from coughs or sneezes. Make sure tissues are available for runny noses and sneezing. Staff and children should cover their mouth with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed. Make sure tissues are available in the day-care business and transport vehicles for runny noses and sneezing.
- **Remind children not to touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way.
- **Use hand sanitizer.** Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not possible. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. (e.g., contact with phone, child's nose, and doorknob).
- **Keep your business open if possible.** Closing a child care business in the event of an outbreak is usually not recommended. If a center closes parents are more likely to take sick and well children to other centers, which spreads the illness to other centers.
- **Avoid close contact.** All children and staff should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, toothbrushes, and toys.
- **Clean frequently and appropriately.** In the child care, frequently clean commonly used surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, toys, and phones. Commercial disinfectants or bleach solutions should be used. (Mixing ¼ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes bleach solution.)

Why children and child care workers should get the flu vaccine every year

The influenza virus changes every year as it makes its way around the world. Since the exact flu viruses are almost never the same from year to year, the strains of influenza in the vaccine changes each year. This is why you need to get a new flu vaccine every year. The vaccine only protects you from influenza for one year.

Vaccination

Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as the vaccine is available, usually early in the fall. This will provide protection for the entire flu season.

If you get sick

Most healthy people recover from the flu without complications. If you get the flu:

- Stay home
- Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- There are over-the-counter (OTC) medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever)
- Remember that serious illness from the flu is more likely in certain groups of people including people 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic condition and young children
- Consult your doctor early for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention

Emergency Warning Signs of Influenza

In **children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- 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
- Fever with a rash

Vaccination Guidelines for Children

The CDC and the IDPH recommend that all children six months of age or older receive influenza vaccination.