



## **Influenza: What Every Parent Needs to Know**

### **1. What is influenza? And how is it transmitted?**

Influenza is a virus that causes an infection commonly referred to as “the flu.” It is transmitted from person to person mainly through respiratory droplet transmission, meaning when an infected person coughs or sneezes near a susceptible person. Another source of transmission may be respiratory droplet contaminated surfaces, which means if you sneeze into your hand then touch a door knob, and then I touch the door knob and touch my face, we could possibly transmit the virus this way.

### **2. What are symptoms of the flu?**

Typically, the infection can cause quick onset of fever, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, cough, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and runny and stuffy nose. In addition, children may develop an ear infection.

### **3. Once someone is exposed, how long does it take to get sick with the flu?**

It usually takes between 1 and 4 days after exposure to develop symptoms. Your child will usually be most contagious during the first three days of symptoms, but can still be contagious for up to 14 days.

### **4. Who is most at risk if they get the flu?**

The greatest mortality is seen in people ages 65 and older. Another group that sees significant mortality is in infants under the age of 6 months. Flu epidemics are spread initially through children—they are the first group to become infected during an outbreak.

## 5. So how do we prevent ourselves from getting the flu?

Frequent hand washing is always important. Another great MommyDocs tip is to teach your children to cough and sneeze into their elbows, not their hands. Proper sleep and nutrition help optimize your body's immune system. And the best way to prevent getting the flu: get vaccinated!

## 6. Who should be vaccinated?

The CDC has some new recommendations this year, one of which is that **all children, ages 6 months up to their 19<sup>th</sup> birthdays, should be vaccinated.** Other people that should be vaccinated include:

- Pregnant women
- Adults over the age of 50
- Adults or children with chronic medical conditions
- Nursing home residents
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications
  - health care workers
  - household contacts of people at risk
  - contacts of children less than 6 months of age

Of course, there are some exceptions to the above, so everyone should check with their physician before getting immunized.

## 7. My child has an allergy to egg. Can she get the flu shot?

The flu vaccines do contain small amounts of egg protein allergens. So if your child is egg allergic, discuss this issue with your physician.

## **8. What are the options for the flu vaccine?**

Right now there are two options: the injectable flu vaccine (the shot) and the intranasal vaccine (not a shot—it's a nasal spray).

## **9. In what ways do the two types of flu vaccines differ?**

Both provide protection against the same three strains of the flu virus. The injectable form contains inactivated virus (so the virus is not alive) and is approved for ages six months and up. The intranasal form consists of drops that go into the nose, and no injection is involved. It contains a live attenuated form of the virus (which means the virus is alive, but very weakened). The intranasal vaccine is approved for people ages 2 through 49 who are healthy and not pregnant. Anyone with a history of wheezing or asthma should not receive the intranasal form.

## **10. Are there side effects from the vaccines?**

In children, the most common side effect from the injectable form is soreness at the injection site. The most common side effect from the intranasal form is a runny and stuffy nose. In studies, other side effects were noted, but the ones listed here were the most statistically significant. If your child has ever had any side effects from the flu vaccine, let your physician know prior to vaccination.

## **11. When should the flu vaccine be given?**

Now! Ideally, the vaccine should be given in the early fall. However, even if it's the middle of winter, it's a good idea for your child to get his flu shot. Flu infections tend to peak in January, but the flu season is quite long, and lasts from the fall through the spring. So even if your child gets his shot in February, the vaccination can still help through the end of winter and into spring.

## **12. How many shots are needed to complete the flu vaccine series?**

The flu vaccine needs to be given each year. This is because there are multiple different subtypes of the virus, and the most prevalent strains vary from year to year. Scientists do their best at determining which strains should be in the vaccine, and this is why the vaccine's effectiveness may have some variability from year to year.

Generally, just one injection or spray dose would be given. However, certain groups need two doses of the vaccine, each given four weeks apart:

-All children under the age of 9 receiving the vaccine for the first time

-Children under 9 who had one dose the year previously, and that was the first year they had the vaccine

If you have additional questions, check out [www.mommydocs.com](http://www.mommydocs.com) for more information. Remember to contact your physicians if you have any questions about the flu, the flu vaccine, or your child's health in general. The MommyDocs wish everyone a healthy flu season!

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