



## Influenza (The Flu) Fact Sheet for Child-Care Settings

### What is the flu?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The viruses attack the nose, throat, and lungs. It is not the “stomach flu.” The flu can be prevented by vaccination.

In 2009-2010, a new and very different flu virus (called 2009 H1N1) spread worldwide. The 2011-2012 flu vaccine will protect against 2009 H1N1 and two other influenza viruses.

### What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu include fever, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, headache, and extreme tiredness. Some children may have additional symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea.

### How is the flu spread?

The flu is spread when an infected person who has the flu coughs or sneezes and sends the flu virus into the air. The virus enters the nose, throat, or lungs of a person and multiplies. Flu also spreads (though less likely) when a person touches the surface of an object that has flu viruses on it. The virus then enters the body when the person rubs his or her nose.

### Is the flu dangerous?

Children less than 2 years old—even healthy children—are at high risk of ending up in the hospital if they get the flu. Vaccinating young children, their families, and other caregivers can help protect them from getting sick. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections as complications from the flu.

### Can the flu be prevented?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends getting vaccinated in September or as soon as the 2011-2012 seasonal influenza vaccine is available. Getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial, because influenza activity typically occurs in January or later.

Other measures include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home from work or school when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, thus reducing the spreading of germs

### Who should get vaccinated?

The CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends annual influenza vaccine for all people aged 6 months and older.

## **Should all children be vaccinated?**

The flu vaccine is not approved for use in children less than 6 months old. Children under 6 months old can also get very sick from the flu, but they are too young to get a flu vaccine. The best way to protect young children is to make sure that their household members and their caregivers are vaccinated.

## **Is the flu vaccine safe?**

The risk of the flu vaccine causing serious harm, or death is extremely small. However, like any medicine, a vaccine may rarely cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. Almost all people who get influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it.

## **What are the side effects that could occur?**

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Low-grade fever

## **What should you do if you get the flu?**

If you have the flu (or a temperature of 100.4° F or higher):

- Stay home
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Cover your mouth when coughing and sneezing
- Wash your hands frequently

If symptoms get worse, seek medical attention. Parents should contact their health care provider immediately if they have any concerns about their child's recovery. This would include a child having problems breathing, being too sleepy, or not taking enough fluids.

DO NOT give aspirin to children for treatment of flu symptoms because of the risk of Reye syndrome, an acute and potentially life-threatening condition that results when children take aspirin or aspirin-containing products during certain viral illnesses.

## **Where can you get more information?**

Call your doctor, nurse, local health department, or the Texas Department of State Health Services, Immunization Branch at (800) 252-9152.