



Children and the Flu

What is the flu?

The flu (influenza) is a highly contagious virus that affects the respiratory system. It is most common in winter and should not be confused with the common cold.

How can you catch the flu?

The flu is an air-borne virus. You can catch it when someone with the flu releases droplets from their throat or nose (this can happen while sneezing, coughing or even talking) into the air.

How to Keep Your Kids Safe from the Flu

Basic hygiene and good old-fashioned common sense will go a long way to protecting your child from falling ill. You'll have a better chance of flu-proofing your child if you teach him to:

- Wash his hands often. He should always use soap and take at least 20 seconds to wash his hands thoroughly. If your child is coughing or sneezing, it is particularly important that he regularly wash his hands.
- Keep his hands away from his mouth, eyes and nose. Curious little hands will pick up germs and one of the fastest ways to get sick is by transmitting those germs to the body via the mouth, eyes and nose.
- Cough hygienically. Coughing can quickly spread germs so teach your child to cover his mouth when he coughs, preferably into the crook of his arm or into a tissue as opposed to his hands.
- Blow his nose. There's nothing like a streaming nose to efficiently spread germs – particularly if hands go to the runny nose and then onto food or toys. Teaching your child to blow his own nose will take many years of patience and instruction but if you start early, he'll get the general idea fairly quickly.
- Bin the tissues. Don't let used tissues lie around as they are potent germ carriers. They belong in the bin immediately after use.
- Sneeze discretely. The spray that comes with a big sneeze can go far and wide, so teach your child to sneeze into his hand or a tissue. Hands must then be washed and tissue disposed of.

Flu Symptoms

Coming down with the flu is an unpleasant experience for everyone but for children, particularly young children, who are unable to articulate their symptoms, it pays to keep a close eye on their general health at all times during flu season, as they can quickly become unwell once the first symptoms of flu appear. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Congestion
- Cough

- Chills
- Body aches
- Tiredness
- Weakness

Children may also experience nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

When there's Flu in the Family

When a family member is unwell with the flu, you can limit the spread of the illness to other family members by these simple steps:

- Quarantine the sick child as much as possible. Keep him in his bed, and perhaps consider moving him to a spare room if he shares a bedroom with siblings.
- Encourage all family members to be particularly vigilant about washing their hands.
- Keep your sick child well stocked with tissues – and remind him to use them.
- Keep your sick child at home. The only time you should leave the house with a sick child is to take him to a medical appointment. Ask friends and family for assistance with shopping, collecting other children from school etc during this time of illness.
- Keep the bathroom your sick child is using extremely clean at all times. Consider disinfecting it daily to make it safe for others to use.
- Limit the amount of contact your sick child has with family members. Try to have only one caregiver and discourage visitors to the sick room. Pregnant women, particularly, should avoid contact with ill children.
- Keep the house, especially the sick room, well-ventilated at all times.
- Keep your sick child's face away from your own to avoid being coughed and sneezed on.

The Flu Vaccine

The flu vaccine offers protection against influenza infection and must be given every year as each year the influenza virus changes. It is recommended that children under 9 years receive two doses of flu vaccine at least one month apart when receiving the flu vaccine for the first time to receive the maximum protection.

IMPORTANT!

You cannot catch the flu from the flu vaccine. The vaccine is made of dead flu viruses and transmission of the illness in this way is not possible.

Swine Flu and Your Child

With reported cases of swine flu increasing across Australia, it's easy to become concerned about the potential risks this flu outbreak may cause you and your family. The best things you can do to protect your family against swine flu are:

- Be aware of areas of outbreak. Have there been any cases reported in your area?
- Be aware of who your kids are playing with. If friends appear to be unwell, contact their parents.
- Keep your kids home if they are unwell. This is the time to be conservative with their health.

What You Need to Know About Swine Flu

- If you do come in contact with someone who has swine flu and you show no symptoms of becoming ill after seven days, it is extremely unlikely that you will get sick.
- You cannot catch swine flu (or any other form of influenza) from inanimate objects. Clothing and toys cannot be carriers of swine flu.

REMEMBER!

Most cases of swine are mild and can be treated at home like other forms of seasonal flu. Potentially, any strain of the flu can be fatal. The young, the old, pregnant women, as well as those living with chronic illnesses are particularly vulnerable to flu-related complications.

This article was written by Ella Walsh for Kidspot – Australia’s leading website for kids health. Sources include WA Govt’s Dept of Health