



FACT SHEET

High-Risk Children and the Flu

All Children 6-23 Months

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all children 6 to 23 months of age get a flu shot each year, unless they have medical contraindications to the shot. The flu causes more severe problems in infants and toddlers than in older children. The first time a child under 10 years of age receives the flu shot, they should be given two doses, one month apart, if at all possible.

High-Risk Children Over 6 Months

The flu shot should also be given to those children over 6 months that are at higher risk for problems due to getting the flu.

Children at high-risk have:

- asthma
- cardiac disease
- sickle cell disease
- HIV or diabetes.

Infants Younger Than 6 Months

Infants six months or younger, cannot receive a flu shot, therefore parents have to be extra cautious in protecting them. The best way to protect children is for parents, family members and caregivers to get the flu shot. This will help prevent exposing the baby to any illness. Next, keep babies away from crowds. The less people they are around, the less illness. Always cover coughs and wash hands frequently with soap and water. Be sure everyone in contact with your baby washes their hands. If infants get the flu, they are at a greater risk to being hospitalized.

Young children can shed virus for longer than 7 days. In general, however, more virus is shed earlier in the illness than later.

Preventing Flu

Vaccination: Remember, it is important that healthcare workers, household members and other people in close contact with high-risk children, get the flu shot.

In the absence of vaccine, however, there are other ways to protect against flu.

Antiviral Medications: Three antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, and oseltamivir) are approved and commercially available for use in preventing flu. All of these medications are prescription drugs, and a doctor should be consulted before the drugs are used for preventing the flu.

Other Habits for Good Health

The following steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like flu:

- ***Avoid close contact***

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

- ***Stay home when you are sick***

If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

- ***Cover your mouth and nose***

Cover your mouth and nose with a **tissue** when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

- ***Clean your hands***

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.

- ***Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth***

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

Urgent Medical Attention Required

If your child gets the flu, there are some “emergency warning signs” that require urgent medical attention for a child at any age. **If your child experiences the following, please take them to a doctor or hospital.**

These signs include:

- high or prolonged fever
- fast breathing or trouble breathing
- bluish skin color and
- not drinking enough fluids.

Other signs to look out for are:

- changes in mental status, such as not waking up or not interacting
- being so irritable that the child does not want to be held or
- seizures.

Some flu-like symptoms may improve but then return, with fever and a worse cough or a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions, like heart, lung disease or diabetes.

What to Do If You Get Sick This Flu Season

If you develop the flu, it is advisable to get plenty of rest, drink a lot of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco. Also, you can take medications to relieve the symptoms of flu (but *never* give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – and particularly fever – without first speaking to your doctor.)

If you are at special risk from complications of flu, you should consult your health-care provider when your flu symptoms begin. Your doctor may choose to use certain antiviral drugs to treat the flu.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu, or call the National Immunization Hotline at (800) 232-2522 (English), (800) 232-0233 (español), or (800) 243-7889 (TTY).