

What to do if your child gets the flu

Flu season arrived early this year with a new virus called H1N1 pandemic flu and now seasonal influenza is here. It's difficult to tell the two flu types apart since they have similar symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, and body aches.

The best way to prevent these two types of influenza is to get vaccinated for each: H1N1 and seasonal influenza. Eventually there will be ample supply of both vaccines for all.

If the flu strikes

People with flu symptoms should stay home from work, school, and daycare to avoid contact with other people and spreading infection. Most people who get the flu generally experience mild symptoms that can be cared for at home. While there may be a few days of feeling miserable, for most, the symptoms do not require medical treatment. People with the flu need plenty of rest and liquids, and may use medicine to reduce fever and pain.



Easing flu symptoms

- Antiviral medications such as Tamiflu® can help lessen flu symptoms, but require a prescription. These are generally given to children under age 2 and to children with conditions at high risk for influenza complications. These conditions include asthma, diabetes, neurological problems or immune deficiencies. However, most people do not need antiviral drugs to fully recover from the flu.
- Children 5 years of age and older and teenagers with the flu can take medicines **without** aspirin, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), to relieve symptoms of fever and pain.
- Use a suction bulb to help clear away mucus for infants and young children who cannot blow their nose.
- Over-the-counter-cold and flu medications used according to the package instructions may help lessen some symptoms such as cough and congestion.
- Do **NOT** give over-the-counter cold medications to children younger than 4 years of age without first speaking to a health care provider.

Watch for severe flu symptoms

It's possible for otherwise healthy people to develop severe illness, so anyone concerned about their child's illness or their own health should call their health care provider. People with severe symptoms may need to be seen in the Emergency Department.

Warning signs in children

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing, including specific pain in the chest while breathing
- Bluish or grayish skin color
- Difficulty drinking fluids or keeping fluids down due to nausea or vomiting
- Signs of dehydration like dry mouth, or in infants, lack of tears when crying or dry diapers
- Not waking up easily, or not interacting
- Being so irritable the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever or pain that is difficult to manage

Rest and recover

- Children in daycare and health care workers should stay home 7 days from the onset of symptoms or until they are fever free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.
- School-age children and adults in non-health care settings may return to work and school when they are fever free for 24 hours without using a medicine to reduce their fever.



Lessen the spread of flu at home

- Care for your sick child in a room separate from common areas of the house if possible.
- Limit visitors to only the caregiver(s) of children and family members who are ill.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, bathroom surfaces, and children's toys) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.
- Wash hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and toss it in a paper bag that can be emptied into the trash. No tissue? Then cough or sneeze into your sleeve.

Know who's at risk of flu complications

Some children and adults are at high risk of serious flu-related complications. Call your clinic or the Minnesota FluLine to get advice about seeking medical care for:

- Young children, especially those less than 2 years of age
- Pregnant women
- People with conditions that make them vulnerable to illness such as asthma or chronic lung disease, blood, kidney or liver disorders, diabetes, heart disease, immune system problems, or other chronic conditions



Vaccination: the best flu protection

The best way to protect against influenza is to be vaccinated. It is recommended that children older than 6 months be vaccinated against both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu.

- **Seasonal flu vaccine** can be given as soon as it is available and will provide protection throughout the influenza season.
- **H1N1 flu vaccine** is available in limited supply now but eventually there will be enough vaccine for everyone this flu season.
- It is recommended that children older than 6 months through age 9 years receive two doses of both the H1N1 and the seasonal flu vaccine, with at least 21 days between the first and second dose.

