

Flu Alert: Prevention and Treatment Information

Clinical Services and Patient Care Programs

HOW CAN YOU HELP PREVENT THE FLU?

Flu vaccine supplies are sometimes limited and used first for children who are at high risk. Check with your pediatrician regarding availability of the vaccine this season. Here are other actions that you can take to help reduce your child's exposure to flu viruses and the risk of developing the flu:

- Wash your hands often, especially after you have been out in public or touched things that other people have touched, like a grocery cart, a gas pump or even a doorknob. Your child should wash his hands after sharing toys or books with friends.
- To prevent spreading the flu, turn your head when you cough and sneeze into disposable tissues.
- Do not expose infants to large crowds during the flu season.
- Avoid close contact with family members who have the flu.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR THE FLU?

There are four important things to remember when treating a child with the flu:

1. Rest—Your child should get plenty of rest, but he should “perk up” at least briefly every four hours. If he does not have brief periods of feeling better, call your doctor.
2. Fluids—The best fluids are clear liquids, including water, clear juices and sports drinks. If your child rejects most solid foods for a day or two, that's okay, so long as he continues to drink well and urinate normally. If your child does want to eat, feed him bland foods in small amounts.
3. Fever Control
 - Treat the fever using an acetaminophen or ibuprofen product such as Tylenol[®] or Advil[®]. Never use any product containing aspirin or stomach-coating liquids with salicylates. Check the product's label carefully for these substances.
 - One final key to controlling your child's fever is how he is dressed or how he is covered when in bed. Bundling him up will make it harder for the medicine to lower his temperature. Dress or cover your child as you normally would for the temperature of the room he is in.
4. Close Observation for Signs of Complications—These signs include very frequent cough, rash and vomiting.

WHEN SHOULD YOU SEEK MEDICAL HELP?

- If your child is breathing rapidly or having trouble breathing
- If your child is having convulsions or a seizure
- If your child is not alert or is disoriented
- If your child has persistent vomiting
- If your child has a bluish skin color
- If your child is so irritable he doesn't want to be held
- If your child is more susceptible to the flu or a complication. For example, if your child is:
 - Less than two years old
 - Has a pre-existing medical condition, such as diabetes, asthma or kidney disease
 - On treatment or has a disease that decreases the body's ability to fight infection

WHAT OTHER TREATMENTS CAN HELP?

Two other treatments may help in some cases.

1. Decongestants and antihistamines usually don't work very well for children. However, if a certain medicine has worked well for your child in the past, try one dose and continue only if it is clearly helpful. Cough medicines are not recommended for the flu, as coughing is the body's way of cleaning the lungs. Be sure to follow package directions for dosage amounts.
2. Prescription medications are available to treat the flu. However, there are some facts to be considered.
 - They must be prescribed by a doctor.
 - They must be given within 48 hours of the first flu symptoms or they will not help.
 - At best, they will reduce the length of your child's illness by 24 to 36 hours.
 - Some may have side effects.
 - At times, the liquid form of these drugs may be hard to find.

Given these facts, many pediatricians do not prescribe these medications for previously healthy children with the flu. The medications may be used for children who are hospitalized or who are at high risk from complications because of underlying medical problems.

If you are unsure if your child has the flu, you suspect your child may have the flu, or your child does not respond to these recommendations, contact your pediatrician or family doctor immediately.

Visit our Web site at www.choa.org for further information.