

# Protecting Against Influenza (Flu): Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 2 Years Old

--From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), August 17, 2005

## Background

Recent studies have shown that children less than 2 years old - even previously healthy children - are more likely than older children to end up in the hospital with serious complications if they get influenza (the flu). These complications can include pneumonia (an illness in which the lungs get infected and inflamed), dehydration (when a child is too sick to drink enough fluids and its body loses too much water), worsening of long-term medical problems like heart disease or asthma, encephalopathy (a disease of the brain), and sinus problems and ear infections. In rare cases, complications from the flu can lead to death.

Because children are at increased risk of getting severe illness from the flu, CDC recommends that all children 6 months to 23 months old get a flu shot. (Flu shots are not approved for use in children less than 6 months old.) Also, household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 2 years old should get vaccinated against the flu. This is particularly important for contacts of children less than 6 months of age, because children less than 6 months old cannot be vaccinated themselves and cannot be given antiviral medications to treat the flu.

## Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 2 Years Old

### 1.) *Get Vaccinated*

If you live with or care for a child less than 2 years old, you are in a priority group for flu vaccination. There are two types of influenza vaccines:

- The "flu shot" - an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle - is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine - a vaccine made with live, weakened influenza viruses - is approved for use in healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.

### 2.) *Practice Good Health Habits*

Certain good health habits can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like the flu. Protect yourself and your child by following these steps routinely:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze-throw the tissue away after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, and as soon as possible after you cough or sneeze on them. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Keep you and your baby away from people who are coughing or sneezing, as much as you can.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth since germs can spread this way.

### **Advice for Caregivers Who Get the Flu**

In addition to vaccination, if you live with or care for a child less than 2 years old, follow the precautions below to help to prevent the spread of illness to your child.

#### **1.) Remember How the Flu Spreads**

The main way that flu spreads is in respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and infect someone nearby. Though much less frequent, the flu may also spread through indirect contact with respiratory droplets.

#### **2.) Follow These Steps**

If you get flu-like symptoms, which can include a fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, or body aches, follow the precautions below:

- Check with your health-care provider. (If you have influenza, your doctor may prescribe antiviral medications for you.)
- If you work in day care, do not go to work if you become sick.
- Try to minimize contact with your child as much as possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, and put your used tissue in a waste basket.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and as soon as possible after you sneeze or cough on them. If you are not near water use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Take these precautions for the first 5 days of your illness (beginning the first day you notice symptoms).

#### **3.) Be Watchful**

Observe your child closely for symptoms of respiratory illness. If they develop a fever (100°F or higher under the arm, 101°F orally, or 102°F rectally), respiratory symptoms, or are less responsive than normal, contact your child's doctor.