

# Flu (Influenza) and the Vaccine to Prevent It

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**The best way to protect against flu is by getting a flu vaccine. Doctors recommend that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine every year by the end of October, if possible.**

## Why should my child get a flu vaccine?

A flu vaccine:

- Helps protect your child from flu illness, including serious illness that can result in hospitalization and even death.
- Helps prevent your child from spreading flu to others, including babies younger than 6 months who are too young to get a flu vaccine.
- Helps keep your child from missing school or child care (and keeps you from missing work to care for your child).

## Are flu vaccines safe?

Yes. Flu vaccines have a good safety record. Flu vaccines have been used in the United States for more than 50 years. During that time, hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received seasonal flu vaccines. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects, but, most people who get a flu vaccine have no side effects or mild side effects that go away on their own within a few days.

## What are the side effects?

Flu vaccination can cause mild side effects. For example, people vaccinated with a flu shot may feel achy and their arm might be sore where the shot was given. These side effects are NOT the flu. If experienced at all, these effects are usually mild and go away on their own within a few days.

## Only Injectable Flu Shots This Season:

- Flu shots are usually given in the arm. Children 6 months and older should get an injectable flu shot every year. The nasal spray flu vaccine (LAIV) is not recommended for the 2017-2018 season.

## What is the flu?

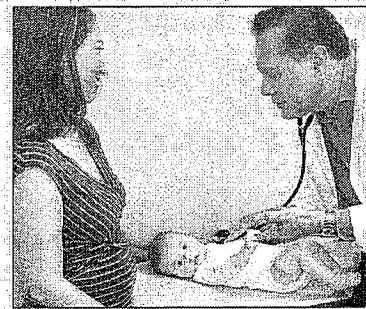
Flu—short for influenza—is an illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu viruses infect the nose, upper airways, throat, and lungs. Flu spreads easily and can cause serious illness, especially for young children, older people, pregnant women, and people with certain long-term medical conditions like asthma and diabetes.

## What are the symptoms of the flu?

Flu symptoms can include the following:

- Fever (not everyone with the flu has a fever) or feeling feverish/chills
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Headache
- Muscle or body aches
- Tiredness
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea (this is more common in children than adults)

Most people who get influenza recover in a few days to less than two weeks. Some people develop complications (such as pneumonia) that can result in hospitalization and even death.



Doctors recommend that your child get a flu vaccine every year starting when he is 6 months old. Some children 6 months through 8 years of age may need 2 doses for best protection.

## Is it serious?

Millions of children get sick with flu each year and thousands are hospitalized. CDC estimates that since 2010, flu-related hospitalizations in children younger than 5 years old have ranged from 6,000 to 26,000 in the United States each year. Children with long-term medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and disorders of the brain or nervous system, and children younger than 5 years old (and children especially younger than 2 years old) are more likely to end up in the hospital from flu.

Flu seasons vary in how serious they are from one season to another. Since 2004, the total number of reported flu-associated deaths in children has ranged from 37 to 171 per season. This range doesn't include the 2009 pandemic, when states reported 358 flu-associated deaths in children to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some of the more serious complications from flu include:

- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids)
- Worsening of long-term medical conditions, like asthma and diabetes

## How does flu spread?

Flu spreads when people who have flu talk, cough, or sneeze, and droplets that have the virus in them land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. You may also get flu by touching an object with flu virus on it—like a doorknob or used tissue—and then touching your own eyes, nose, or mouth. People can spread flu to others from one day before they have symptoms to 5-7 days after they get sick. This can be longer in children and people who are very sick.

People who have the flu should stay home and away from others (except to go to the doctor) until 24 hours after their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

## Can my child get flu from a flu vaccine?

No, flu vaccines do not cause flu. Flu vaccine protects your child from flu illness. However, flu shots can sometimes cause mild side effects that may be mistaken for flu. Keep in mind that it will take about 2 weeks after getting his vaccine for your child to build protection against flu.

## Why does my child need a flu vaccine every year?

Flu viruses are constantly changing, so new vaccines are made each year to protect against the flu viruses that are likely to cause the most illness. Also, protection provided by flu vaccination wears off over time. Your child's flu vaccine will protect against flu all season, but vaccination will be needed again for the next flu season.

## Where can I learn more about flu vaccine and my child?

To learn more about flu vaccines, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO, or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents). For more in-depth information about flu, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).

## How can I protect my child against the flu?

- Get your flu vaccine while you are pregnant. This can help protect your baby for the first few months after birth, before they can get their own flu vaccine.
- Get your vaccine every year, and ask your baby's caregivers to get vaccinated as well.
- Make sure your child gets their dose(s) of flu vaccine soon after it's available each season.
- Children younger than 9 years old who are getting vaccinated for the first time need two doses of flu vaccine, spaced at least 28 days apart. Children who only get one dose but need two doses can have reduced or no protection from a single dose of flu vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.



# 5 Common Illnesses Kids Pick Up in School

How to help your kids avoid common school infections

By [Katherine Lee](#) | Reviewed by [Joel Forman, MD](#)

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Does it ever seem like your school-age child brings home a new [infection](#) every few weeks? Kids get a lot of wonderful things in school—math and reading skills, development of social skills to make friends and cooperate with others, learning how to be disciplined and [independent](#)—to name just a few. But the unfortunate reality is that school can be a hotspot for bacteria and viruses and a source for lots of common kid illnesses, especially for younger school-age kids whose [immune systems](#) are still maturing.

And since kids tend to spend more time indoors in the fall and winter months, and younger children in particular tend to play closer together and share toys and other classroom items, infections are easily passed from one person to another. "People think there are more viruses in the winter, but in winter, there is more people-to-people contact," says Henry Bernstein, DO, professor of pediatrics at Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine in New York and a spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics. "Windows and doors are shut, and therefore viruses are spreading more." Here are some illnesses kids typically pick up at school, and what parents should know about common symptoms, prevention tips, and when to call the doctor.

## Flu

As common as it is, the [influenza virus](#) is dangerous: It is responsible for thousands of death each year, and not all of those victims are among the high-risk populations.

"The vaccine is recommended each and every year for children 6 months of age and older," says Dr. Bernstein. Symptoms often include a quick onset of illness, a high fever (103 degrees or higher), body aches and chills, headache, severe exhaustion, and decreased appetite. Your child may also have a cough, sore throat, and in some cases, vomiting and/or diarrhea and belly pain.

Many respiratory illnesses, including strep throat or pneumonia, can resemble the flu, so call your doctor if you see these symptoms, says Dr. Bernstein.

**Prevention tip:** Teach kids to wash their hands properly and often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom. They should also be reminded to always wash their hands after sneezing or coughing. Kids should also use alcohol sanitizer in school, especially during cold and flu season. And remind kids to not share drinking cups or eating utensils at school.

## Cold

[Colds](#) are usually caused by rhinoviruses, which are tiny infectious organisms that can live on surfaces for hours. These viruses can enter the lining of the nose and throat and multiply and grow, triggering an immune system response that causes sore throats, cough, headaches, and sneezing. Your child may also develop a stuffy or runny nose and mild fever.

**Prevention tip:** One of the most common ways colds are transmitted is when a child comes into contact with a cold virus and then touches her eyes or nose. Make sure your child [washes her hands](#) properly often, and remind her not to touch her eyes, nose, or mouth. You can also help [keep your child's immune system healthy](#) by making sure she gets [enough sleep](#), eats a [healthy diet](#), and gets lots of exercise.

## Pinkeye

Pinkeye, or conjunctivitis, is an inflammation or infection of the clear membrane that covers the white part of the eyeball and the inner surface of the eyelid. This common eye disease can be caused by a bacterial or viral infection as well as allergies, pollutants such as smoke, chemicals in cosmetics, or chlorine in pools. A child may complain of eye irritation or a sensitivity to light and you may see excessive tearing or discharge, swollen eyelids, and a redness in the whites of the eyes (hence the name "pinkeye").

**Prevention tip:** Pinkeye is easily passed from person to person (a child can get pinkeye by touching something that an infected person has touched, and then touching his own eye), which is why children who have been diagnosed with conjunctivitis are kept out of school until they've started treatment and are no longer contagious.

Remind kids often to not touch their eyes, nose, or mouth, which is a good way to help ward off pinkeye as well as other infections.

## Strep Throat

This common infection in kids is caused by a strain of bacteria called group A streptococcus. Strep throat is highly contagious and can spread through airborne droplets when someone who has the infection sneezes or coughs. Strep throat can also be transmitted through sharing drinks or food, or by touching a surface such as a doorknob that is harboring the bacteria and then touching one's own eyes, nose, or mouth. Your child may complain of a sore throat and pain when swallowing, and she may have a fever, rash, headache, nausea or vomiting, tiny red spots on the back of the roof of the mouth, and swollen tonsils.

**Prevention tip:** Teach your child to be especially careful about sharing things with friends and classmates who are coughing or sneezing. Remind your child to wash her hand often, especially if a classmate is sick.

## Gastroenteritis

Also called "stomach flu" or "stomach bug," gastroenteritis is inflammation of the stomach and intestines, which can lead to vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, and fever. Gastroenteritis can be caused by bacteria, a virus, or a parasite. When kids are fighting a stomach bug, the most important thing to remember is to keep them well hydrated. "Bodies tend to not work well when they are dehydrated," says Dr. Bernstein. Have kids sip water or a rehydration solution (such as Pedialyte or Gatorade) that contain electrolytes, which become depleted when a child throws up and has diarrhea.

**Prevention tip:** The best way to prevent gastroenteritis is by encouraging your child to wash his hands, and to avoid close contact with someone who is has a stomach bug.

## When to Call the Doctor

For any illness, call your pediatrician if you see any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- High fever (103 degrees or higher)
- No fever but acting ill ("If a child has a low-grade fever but appears to be ill, that's more concerning than if he has a high fever but is acting like himself," says Dr. Bernstein.)
- Dehydration (Signs include little to no urine production, sluggishness, and dry mouth)
- Lack of appetite and refusing food that lasts for more than a couple of days