Children and the Flu

Influenza (flu) is different from the common cold and can be more severe for children. The flu usually comes on suddenly and is often accompanied by fever, aches, chills and extreme tiredness. A cold is usually less severe and often includes a runny nose. Parents should visit their child’s doctor as quickly as possible if they notice flu symptoms in their child, as there are prescription medicines available for the flu.

In both children and adults, flu symptoms can include fever, headache, muscle and body aches, fatigue and cough. Children can have additional flu symptoms that are less common in adults, including vomiting and diarrhea.

Children with the flu should stay home from school, daycare or play groups for at least 24 hours after their fever breaks.

Children younger than 5, especially those younger than 2, are particularly vulnerable.

Each year an average of 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized because of influenza-related complications.

Children are 2-3x more likely than adults to get sick with the flu.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends “Take 3” actions to fight the flu:

1. Take time to get a flu vaccine
2. Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs
3. Take prescription flu medicines if your doctor prescribes them

The flu vaccine is the first and most important step in preventing influenza.

See a doctor quickly. Prescription flu treatment should begin within 2 days (48 hours) of flu symptom onset.

Flu viruses are spread mainly by respiratory droplets from coughing, talking and sneezing.

Children can remain contagious longer than adults (more than seven days).

Some flu viruses can live for 2-8 hours on surfaces such as cafeteria tables, doorknobs and desks.

Children are more likely than adults to get sick with the flu.

Caregivers miss 11 hours of work seeking medical care when a child is sick with flu.

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