

Medical Urgent Care  
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Clinical Reference Systems: Pediatric Advisor 11.0

## Influenza

### Description

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi that occurs in epidemics every 3 or 4 years (for example, Asian influenza). Symptoms include a stuffy nose, sore throat, muscle pain, headache, fever, and chills. These symptoms are typically more severe than with a common cold.

For most people, influenza is just a "bad" cold and bed rest is not necessary. The dangers of influenza for healthy people are overrated.

### Home Care

The treatment of influenza depends on a child's main symptoms and is no different from the treatment for other viral respiratory infections. Bed rest is not necessary.

#### 1. Fever or aches

Use acetaminophen every 6 hours or aspirin-like products every 8 hours for fever over 102°F (39°C). Children and adolescents who may have influenza should never take aspirin because it may cause Reye's syndrome.

For more information on treating fever, see Fever.

#### 2. Cough or hoarseness

Give your child cough drops. If your child is younger than 4 years old, give corn syrup (1/2 to 1 teaspoon as needed). (See Cough .)

#### 3. Sore throat

Use hard candy for children over 4 years old. Warm chicken broth may also help children over 1 year old. (See Sore Throat .)

#### 4. Stuffy nose

Warm-water or saline nose drops and suction (or nose blowing) will open most blocked noses. Use nasal washes at least four times a day or whenever your child can't breathe through the nose. Saline nose drops are made by adding 1/2 teaspoon of salt to 1 cup of warm water. (See Colds .)

#### 5. Contagiousness

Influenza spreads rapidly because the incubation period is only 24 to 36 hours and the virus is very contagious.

Your child may return to day care or school after the fever is gone and he feels up to it.

## Influenza Vaccine and Prevention

Influenza vaccine gives protection for only 1 or 2 years. In addition, the vaccine itself can cause fever in 20% of the people who get the shots and a sore injection site in 10%. Therefore, the vaccine is not recommended for healthy children (unless an especially severe form of influenza comes along). Only children with chronic diseases (for example, asthma) need to come in for yearly influenza boosters. Talk with your physician if you think your child should have flu shots.

### Call Your Child's Doctor Immediately If:

- Your child is having difficulty breathing.
- Your child starts to act very sick.

### Call Your Child's Doctor During Office Hours If:

- Your child develops any complications such as an earache, sinus pain or pressure, or a fever lasting over 3 days.
- You have other questions or concerns.

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