



Protecting Against Influenza (Flu): Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 6 Months Old

Background

Research has shown that children younger than 5 years of age are at high risk of serious flu-related complications. It's estimated that more than 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized due to flu each year in the United States. Many more have to go to a doctor, an urgent care center, or the emergency room because of flu.

Complications from the flu can include pneumonia (an illness where the lungs get infected and inflamed), dehydration (when a child is too sick to drink enough fluids and their body loses too much water), worsening of long-term medical problems like heart disease or asthma, encephalopathy (inflammation of the brain), and sinus problems and ear infections. In rare cases, flu complications can lead to death.

CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a yearly flu vaccine. This is especially important for children because they are at increased risk of getting severe illness from flu. (Children younger than 6 months are too young to get vaccinated. Children younger than 9 years getting a flu vaccine for the first time need two doses of vaccine in the first year (</flu/professionals/acip/index.htm>).

Children Younger Than 6 Months at Higher Risk

Children younger than 6 months are at higher risk of serious flu complications, but are too young to get a flu vaccine. Also, influenza antiviral drugs (prescription drugs used to treat and prevent flu) are not approved for use in children younger than 1 year. Because children younger than 6 months cannot get a vaccine or take antiviral drugs, but are at high risk for serious flu-related complications, safeguarding them from influenza is especially important. This fact sheet provides advice to help caregivers (for example, parents, teachers, babysitters, nannies) protect children younger than 6 months from the flu.

Advice for Caregivers of Children Younger Than 2 Years Old

1. Take Time to Get a Vaccine

- A flu vaccine is the best way to protect against the flu.
- Infants younger than 6 months are at high risk for serious flu-related complications, but cannot get a vaccine or take antiviral drugs.
- If you live with or care for an infant younger than 6 months of age, **you** should get a flu vaccine.
- A flu vaccine can protect you and your loved ones – including your infant – from the flu.
- If you live with or care for an infant younger than 6 months of age, you should get a flu vaccine.

2. Take Everyday Preventive Steps

Certain everyday preventive steps like covering your cough and frequent hand washing can help keep germs from spreading.

Protect yourself and your infant 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, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Keep yourself and your baby away from people who are sick, as much as you can.
- If you get the flu, stay home from work or school. If you are sick, do not go near other people so that you don't make them sick too.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread this way.

3. Antiviral Drugs Can Treat Flu Illness

- Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics. They are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) and are not available over-the-counter.
- Antiviral drugs can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
- It's very important that antiviral drugs be used early (within the first 2 days of symptoms) to treat people who are very sick (such as those who are hospitalized) or people who are sick with flu symptoms and who are at increased risk of severe flu illness, such as pregnant women, young children, people 65 and older and people with certain chronic health conditions.
- Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

Advice for Caregivers Who Get the Flu

If you live with or care for an infant younger than 6 months of age, follow the precautions below to help prevent the spread of illness to your infant.

1. Remember How the Flu Spreads

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

2. Follow These Steps

If you get flu-like symptoms (</flu/keyfacts.htm>) which can include a fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headache, fatigue, or sometimes vomiting and diarrhea, follow the precautions below:

- Check with your health care provider. (If you have influenza, your doctor may prescribe antiviral medications for you.)
- Try to minimize contact with your infant 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 or use an alcohol-based hand rub frequently and as soon as possible if you have sneezed or coughed on your hands.
- Before engaging in any activity about 6 feet from your infant (including feeding, changing, rocking, reading to your child) thoroughly wash and dry your hands. See more information about hand hygiene and Good Health Habits (</flu/protect/stopgerms.htm#GoodHealthHabits>).
- Take these precautions for the first 5 to 7 days of your illness (beginning the first day you notice symptoms).

3. Be Watchful

Observe your infant closely for symptoms of respiratory illness. If your child develops a fever (100°F or higher under the arm, 101°F orally, or 102°F rectally), respiratory symptoms, or is less responsive

than normal, contact your child's doctor.

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