



FACT SHEET

Protecting Against the Flu: Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 6 Months Old

Background

Research has shown that children less than 5 years of age are at high risk of serious flu-related complications. It's estimated that more than 20,000 children less than 5 years old are hospitalized due to flu each year in the U.S. 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 its 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, complications from the flu can lead to death.

Because children are at increased risk of getting severe illness from flu, CDC recommends that all children 6 months up to their 5th birthday get a flu vaccine every fall or winter. (Children under 9 getting a flu vaccine for the first time need [two doses of vaccine](#) in the first year.)

Children Younger Than 6 Months at Higher Risk

However, flu vaccine is not approved for use in children less than 6 months. 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 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 less than 6 months from the flu.

Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 6 Months

1.) *Take Time to Get a Vaccine*

- A flu vaccine is the best way to protect against the flu.
- Infants less than 6 months old are at high risk for serious flu-related complications, but cannot get a vaccine or antiviral drugs.
- If you live with or care for an infant less 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.
- This season, an all-time high supply of vaccine will be available so more people than ever can seek protection from the flu as soon as the vaccine becomes available.

2.) *Take Everyday Preventive Steps*

Certain everyday preventive steps like frequent hand washing and covering your cough 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.

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- 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.) Take Antiviral Drugs if Your Doctor Says You Need Them

- There are flu antiviral drugs that can treat the flu or prevent infection with flu viruses.
- For treatment, antiviral drugs should be started within 48 hours of getting sick.
- For prevention, antiviral drugs are 70% to 90% effective in preventing infection.
- These drugs must be prescribed by a health care provider.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms (usually high fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches), or are exposed to the flu before you get a flu vaccine, your health care professional will decide whether you should take antiviral drugs.

Advice for Caregivers Who Get the Flu

If you live with or care for an infant less 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

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 (generally 3 or more feet) through the air and infect someone nearby.

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.)
- 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 within 3-6 feet of your infant (including feeding, changing, rocking, reading to your child), put on a surgical mask (available in most drugstores) and thoroughly wash and dry your hands. (Information about hand hygiene can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/stopgerms.htm#GoodHealthHabits>.) Do not remove your surgical mask until you are done and you have put your infant down.
- Take these precautions for the first 5-7 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.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu or call the CDC Flu Information Line at (800) CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or (800) 243-7889 (TTY).

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