

COURAGE TO CARE



A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, www.usuhs.mil, and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, www.cstsonline.org

CARING FOR CHILDREN DURING THE FLU SEASON

If you are a military mom or dad, grandparent or caregiver, here are some important things you should know about the flu, and caring for children during the flu season.

FACTS ABOUT THE FLU

What is the flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. It can cause mild to severe illness, and in some instances result in death.

How is the flu different from a common cold?

With colds, one rarely gets fevers, headaches or experiences extreme fatigue, all symptoms of the flu (see flu symptoms below).

When and how does the flu spread?

Flu season is November through March. The flu is spread through coughing, sneezing, even touching. You can get the flu from the cough or sneeze of someone who has it, or by touching a surface that someone with the flu has touched (such as a door knob, stair railing or telephone) and then putting that finger or hand in contact with your nose, mouth or eyes. People with the flu are contagious *one day before* their symptoms start and for up to 7 days *after symptoms appear*.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

The flu starts suddenly and may include some of the following:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- In children, sinus infections, ear infections and stomach symptoms (diarrhea, vomiting, nausea) can occur



TIPS TO AVOID GETTING THE FLU

Here are some ways to help avoid getting the flu. This is a good time to teach or remind children about good health habits that can last a lifetime.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and don't expose others to you or your family if sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based handi wipes to protect from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread when you touch something with germs and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

What should I do if my child gets the flu?

- At the first sign of the flu, keep your child at home. Sending a sick child to school puts others at risk: children, teachers and your own child.
- Do not give your child or adolescent aspirin with the flu or a fever. Aspirin can cause Reyes Syndrome, a serious condition that affects the nerves.

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Emergency warning signs: If your child exhibits any of these symptoms, call your doctor immediately:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

- Call your doctor for advice on medications, even over the counter medications as complications can arise in children with other health problems, even healthy children.
- Stay home from work with a sick child or provide childcare at home. Do not leave your child alone.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks lots of liquids.
- Be familiar with your school district's rules on returning a child to school after the flu.

Take Care of Yourself!!

Many military parents are coping with other issues: lengthened deployments, extended time as an only parent, being the parent of a spouse that might be suffering injury or trauma, or living off base with one's family, just to name a few. These issues are stressful, and add to fatigue when illness strikes. If you or your children get sick, seek help from your medical provider. Ask friends or family to run to the market or drugstore. *Better yet, be prepared!* Stock up on canned soups, fruit juices, freeze breads and meats so that in the event of illness there will be healthy food in your home.

MAKE A KIT FOR SCHOOL



You may want to assemble the following items to put in your child's backpack or lunchbox to reinforce good health habits, especially during flu season. Make sure your child's school permits such items taken into the classroom.

In a large plastic zipper bag (freezer bag), put:

- ❑ *Tissues.* Puffs To Go, Kleenex or a drugstore brand all come in small sizes. Many have colorful, fun designs that boys and girls will like and enjoy using.
- ❑ *Antibacterial moist towelettes.* Wet Ones, Nice'N Clean and store brands also come in small sizes that can be opened and resealed.
- ❑ *Small plastic bottles of sanitizing gel* (such as Purell). Children can rub this on their hands; it dissolves, cleans and requires no tissue or towels .
- ❑ *A smaller plastic zipper bag inserted into the larger bag.* Children can put their used tissues into this and seal it. This avoids the spread of germs of tissues thrown into open wastebaskets.

These items can be found in most drugstores in the travel, paper or cold aisles

When you make this kit with your child and explain what each item is for, you've made flu season a *teachable moment!*

Courage to Care is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.

