

Information About the Flu

Dear Parent/ Guardian:

With the flu season upon us, I would like to review key facts about the flu and also list some steps we can all take to help prevent the spread . For more detailed information you can visit the Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) or American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org) web sites or contact your physician.

What is the flu?

- Influenza (flu) is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses which infect the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs).
- Unlike many other upper respiratory infections, the flu can cause severe illness and complications.

How is the flu spread?

- The flu virus is spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes or speaks and sends the virus into the air. When people around that person inhale, the virus enters their body thru the nose, mouth or lungs. The virus multiplies and causes symptoms of the flu. The flu can also be spread when a person touches an object with the flu virus on it and then touches their mouth or nose or eyes.
- Adults and children can be contagious with the flu from 1 day before developing symptoms and may be contagious up to 7 days after getting sick.

What are symptoms of the flu?

- Flu symptoms usually come on suddenly and may include fever (usually high), chills, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. (See chart on back)
- The time from when a person is exposed to the flu virus to when symptoms begin to appear is about 1 to 4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

Good health habits can help to prevent the flu?

- ▶ Wash hands often or use alcohol hand solutions.
- ▶ Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow.
- ▶ Stay home when you are sick (fever, muscle aches, cough)—you will help prevent others from catching the flu.
- ▶ Children with a temperature of 100 degrees or higher should remain home from school until they have been fever-free for a full 24 hours.
- ▶ Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, in case you have touched a surface that is contaminated with the flu virus.
- ▶ Avoid taking young children into large crowds when the flu is in your community.
- ▶ Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces such as door knobs, phones, water faucets, refrigerator handles, etc., if someone in your house has a cold or the flu.

If you or your child catch the flu:

- Drink plenty of fluids such as water, juice or clear soups.
- Rest and stay warm.
- If symptoms persist or become more severe, contact your doctor.
- **Parents should take their child to the pediatrician or ED if he/she displays the following symptoms:**
 - ▶ Rapid or labored breathing, bluish skin color
 - ▶ Not drinking enough to maintain hydration
 - ▶ Not waking up; not interacting
 - ▶ So irritable that he or she doesn't want to be held
 - ▶ Flu symptoms improve but then the child becomes ill again with fever, worse cough
- Stay home until you are well.

School Nurse

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