

What is Influenza (also called Flu)?

The flu is a contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year. Last flu season was the most severe in a decade in all age groups with peak flu activity lasting more than 8 weeks in Chicago! This led to many schools and work absences, doctor's visits, hospitalizations, and long recovery periods.

Is the Flu vaccine effective?

Yes! Don't believe the hype that the vaccine does not matter. Last year, the vaccine was 40% effective overall for all age groups and all strains of flu. However, the vaccine worked better in children and was more effective against some flu strains than others. In children 6 months to 8 years old, the vaccine was over 50% effective. In other words, the flu vaccine reduces a young child's risk of catching the flu by half. Protection begins about 2 weeks after the vaccine has been given. Get the flu vaccine now to be protected before the season peaks.

Flu vaccine keeps you, your family and community safe. Even though the vaccine does not always prevent the illness entirely, it reduces the severity and duration of symptoms. Studies show that adults and children are less likely to need hospitalization if they have received a flu shot. A protected person is also less likely to spread the illness to others. This much is clear: Some protection is far better than no protection at all.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Flu?

Flu symptoms usually start suddenly and include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- No energy or appetite
- Vomiting and diarrhea (though this is more common in young children than adults)

How Flu Spreads

Flu viruses spread by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. Less often, a person could also get flu by contact with a contaminated surface or object, then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Typically, a person becomes ill about 2 days after being exposed to the germ.

Period of Contagiousness

You can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. A person is most contagious in the first 3-4 days after the illness begins

and for up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. The contagious period for young children maybe even longer.

Preventing Seasonal Flu in Schools

The first and most important step in preventing flu is to get a flu vaccine each year. Practical, everyday actions (like staying away from people who are sick, covering coughs and sneezes and frequent handwashing) also help slow the spread of the flu virus. Sick students should stay home until their fever has been resolved for 24 hours (without the use of fever reducers like Tylenol or ibuprofen). No letter is required to return to school.

A flu virus is very fragile and lives only 2-8 hours on surfaces. Standard cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces are helpful to kill or remove them to prevent the spread of the germ. However, cleaning all surfaces in a school is impossible. *If the virus is present in the community, it will also always be present in schools.* Closing a school is rarely if ever an effective measure to prevent the spread of the flu virus and is not helpful according to public health experts.

People at High Risk from Flu

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems related to the flu can happen at any age, but some people are at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes young children, pregnant women, people over 65, and those of any age who are “medically fragile” or have chronic medical conditions (like asthma, diabetes, heart disease or immune deficiencies).

Complications of Flu

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and worsening of chronic medical conditions such as asthma or diabetes.

Treating the Flu

There are influenza antiviral drugs that can be used to treat flu illness. These are by prescription only. Their effectiveness is greatest if started within the first 48 hours of the illness. Please follow up with a doctor right away if you think your child has the flu. People also need other supports to feel better and recover: Rest, fluids, fever and pain control with over the counter medicines like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. (However, children should never use aspirin).

For more information see: www.flu.gov

Or contact the Office of Student Health & Wellness by emailing oshw@cps.edu or calling the Healthy CPS hotline at (773)-553-KIDS(5437) for assistance.

Get a Flu Shot at [CDPH Fast-Track Immunization clinics](#).

Flu Clinic Finder: www.ChicagoFluShots.org