

What Parents Can Do To Care for Their Children With Influenza

(as recommended by the Canadian Paediatric Society)

- Keep your child as comfortable as possible and encourage rest. If he/she has fever, dress him/her in lightweight clothing and keep the room temperature around 20°C.
- Offer cool fluids often. Extra fluids are needed to replace those lost in sweat. If your child's urine is darker than usual, he/she needs to drink more.
- Your child may not want to eat. Offer small, nutritious meals.
- Monitor your child's temperature. For pain relief, muscle aches or fever with temperature higher than 38.5°C, use acetaminophen (eg. Tylenol, Tempra and Panadol). Ibuprofen (eg. Advil and Motrin) may be used for children over six months old. Use the dose and schedule recommended on the package or by your doctor or pharmacist. Do not give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA [eg. Aspirin]) or any cold medicine with it, to children under 18 years with influenza because it can lead to brain and liver damage (Reye Syndrome).
- "Over-the-counter" cough and cold medicines (which don't need a doctor's prescription) should not be given to children younger than 3 years of age unless prescribed by your doctor. Ask your doctor or pharmacist before giving over-the-counter medicines to a child under 12 years of age or anyone who is taking other medicines or has a chronic illness. Read label instructions carefully and do not take more than recommended.
- Coughing helps to clear mucus from the chest. For an older child (over 2 yrs.) with a frequent, dry cough that prevents sleeping, a product with dextromethorphan may help, but studies have shown that these products don't have much benefit. Decongestants and antihistamines won't stop coughing.
- If an infant is having trouble feeding because of a stuffed nose, use a rubber suction bulb to clear the mucus. Use saline (salt & water) nose drops or spray if the mucus is very thick. The spray goes well into the nasal passages and may be more effective than the drops.
- A cool mist humidifier will make a child with a stuffed nose more comfortable. Clean and dry the humidifier thoroughly to prevent bacterial or mold contamination, with hot water (9 parts) and bleach (1part). Hot water vaporizers are not recommended because of the risk of burns.
- Medicated nose drops or sprays provide only brief relief and should not be used for more than 2 to 3 days because nasal congestion can actually get worse. These should not be used in children under 6 years of age. Decongestants taken by mouth are not very effective and can cause rapid heartbeat or insomnia in children. Antihistamines are not effective for influenza.
- Influenza cannot be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics should be used only when children develop bacterial complications, such as ear infection or pneumonia.
- Gargling with warm water will ease a sore throat.

For children 3 years or older, sucking on sugarless hard candy or lozenges containing honey, herbs or pectin also helps. Throat lozenges containing medications that numb the throat (dyclonine, benzocaine, hexylresorcinol, menthol and phenol) should not be used by young children because these may affect their ability to swallow.

When To Seek Medical Attention

You may get advice from Telehealth Ontario's confidential service (available 24 hours per day/ 7 days per week) at 1-866-797-0000, or your family physician. If your symptoms are severe and you think you need immediate attention go to the closest hospital emergency department or call 911.

Seek medical advice if your child:

- has signs of influenza and has lung or heart disease, has an illness or is taking treatment that affect the immune system, takes acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Asprin) regularly for a medical condition or has any other chronic illness requiring regular medical care.
- Is less than 3 months old and has a rectal temperature over 38.5°C.
- Has trouble breathing when resting, is wheezing, has chest pain when breathing or is coughing up bloody sputum (phlegm).
- Drinks very little fluids and has not urinated (peed) at least every 6 hours when awake.
- Has vomiting for more than 4 hours or has severe diarrhea.
- Is constantly irritable and will not calm down.
- Is listless, not interested in playing with toys or unusually sleepy.
- Still has a fever and is not feeling better after 5 days or was feeling better and suddenly develops a new fever.

For detailed information on "Fever and Temperature Taking" please go to www.timiskaminghu.com, on the Timiskaming Health Unit website.

Take your child immediately to a hospital or emergency department or call 911 if your child:

- Has severe breathing trouble or blue lips.
- Has a full or swollen fontanel (soft spot).
- Is limp or unable to move.
- Is hard to wake up or does not respond.
- Has a stiff neck.
- Seems confused.
- Has a seizure (convulsion/fit)

Adapted from the Canadian Paediatric Society;
Caring for Kids and British Columbia Ministry of Health Pandemic Influenza Series.