

FLU FACTS

- Influenza, or “the flu” is an acute respiratory illness that occurs primarily in the winter months. The peak flu season in the northern hemisphere is November through March.
- Influenza is caused by a virus. It can sometimes be confused with the common cold, also caused by a virus. Some people also confuse influenza with the “stomach flu”, consisting of gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- Symptoms usually occur 2-3 days after exposure to the influenza virus. Symptoms include a high grade fever (up to 104°), chills, muscle aches, sore throat, dry cough, and just plain feeling sick (also called malaise). These symptoms commonly last 3-4 days but some can linger for up to 2-4 weeks. In infants, symptoms may also include lethargy, fussiness, and poor feeding.
- Influenza is very contagious, and commonly spreads among family members and in schools and day care centers. Children with influenza should stay home until the fever has resolved. Hand-washing is always very helpful to prevent the spread of infection.
- Your doctor can do a diagnostic test in the office to determine if your child has influenza. A swab is taken from the nose, and the results are available in just a few minutes.
- Antibiotics are not helpful in treating influenza because it is caused by a virus, not a bacteria. Your doctor may prescribe a medication called Tamiflu that can shorten the duration of the illness. For Tamiflu to be effective, influenza must be diagnosed within 48 hours.
- Influenza will resolve on it’s own over time. Treatment should include rest and plenty of fluids. Fever and discomfort can be treated symptomatically with acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Consult with your doctor or pharmacist if you are unsure of the proper dosage for your child.
- You should return to the doctor if your child’s symptoms significantly worsen or fail to improve after one week. Further follow up may be needed.
- Influenza vaccinations are available annually in the fall and should be considered especially for children at high risk for respiratory illness such as those with asthma.