

# Get the Facts: Influenza

---

Influenza (flu) is a contagious illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause serious illness. Some people, such as senior citizens, young children and people with certain health conditions are at high risk for serious flu complications, including hospitalization or death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated each year.

## How can I prevent the spread of flu?

Everyone six months of age or older should get vaccinated. It's the best way to protect your child and others from illness. A flu vaccine is needed every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. Parents should talk to their doctor, a pharmacist or call 311 to locate one of our Fast Track Immunization clinics. We also have a web app at [chicagoflushots.org](http://chicagoflushots.org) where parents can find a nearby clinic or pharmacy to get their child a flu shot.

In addition to getting a flu shot, to protect yourself and your children from the flu, follow these five steps:

1. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water (or, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
2. Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
3. Avoiding close contact with sick people.
4. If you are sick, stay home from school or work.
5. If you start to experience flu-like symptoms, contact your health care provider right away.

## Why are children at higher risk for getting the flu?

Children are at higher risk for the flu because their immune systems are not fully developed. Children with certain health conditions, such as asthma or diabetes, are at an even higher risk of getting the flu and experiencing complications.

## What are the Symptoms?

Flu signs and symptoms usually include fever, cough, sore throat and runny nose, and sometimes people feel tired, have headaches, body aches and chills.

## How do people get the flu?

People with flu can spread it to others up to about six feet away. Most experts think that flu viruses are spread by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be breathed into the lungs. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth or nose.

## What treatment is available?

If your child is experiencing flu-like symptoms, contact your child's healthcare provider. Your child's provider may decide to prescribe medication to help ease your child's symptoms and make them feel better faster. Make sure your child takes all medication as directed. Keep ill children in a separate room from other household members. All members of the household should wash hands frequently with soap and water. If you do not have a healthcare provider, **call 311 to locate a Neighborhood Health Clinic.**

**Concerned parents with an ill child should contact their medical provider.**