

## **INFLUENZA--The "FLU"**

**03/2021**

**Influenza** is a virus that causes periodic epidemics of severe "flu" symptoms, mainly fever, cough, cold, aches and pains, sore throat, and generalized discomfort. The onset is usually rapid, with the severity of the symptoms depending on the age, prior conditions, and even the time of day. Most influenza epidemics create symptoms that last for 5 to 10 days. Influenza cannot be helped by antibiotics, although in a major outbreaks we might try an anti-flu medicine such as Tamiflu if caught very early. Unfortunately, these medications may be subject to shortages at local pharmacies, may not be effective for all flu strains, and may cause some temporary confusion.

Some people confuse the "flu" as described above, with the "stomach flu" of vomiting and diarrhea. Actually the "stomach flu" is not influenza at all, and is a totally different disease. Influenza does not usually cause vomiting or diarrhea. The term influenza comes from the Middle Ages when people stricken with this illness were considered under the 'influence' of evil spirits.

Usually all that we can do is treat each symptom as it crops up. Fever in younger children can be treated with the appropriate dose of ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol). In children without stomach upset, ibuprofen probably works better against the aches, pains, and fever of the flu. Remember to NEVER give aspirin to a child with the flu because of a rare illness called Reye's syndrome.

Coughs and colds can be treated with whatever medicine you have that works best in your child. If you have no preference, Benadryl or Delsym are inexpensive, non-prescription medicines that can help. You can also try Vicks VapoRub medicines. A teaspoonful of honey can sooth a bad cough and sore throat quite well, but do not use in infants less than 1 year old. Give popsicles and Chloraseptic spray for severe sore throat.

If your child has asthma, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, or is less than 2 years old they are at higher risk for flu complications. Some 10% of flu stricken individuals may develop a secondary infection, such as ear infection or bronchitis, in which case, call us for an appointment. Of course, if your child has breathing distress or other severe symptoms go directly to the emergency room.

In general give plenty of clear liquids and soup, and run a humidifier.

Your child may not return to school until ALL of the following are present

- the fever has been gone for 24 hours
- the child feels okay
- The child is no longer coughing so much as to be a nuisance.

## **PREVENTION OF FLU**

Flu immunization is highly recommended for ALL people over 6 months of age. The traditional **flu shot** is a killed vaccine that stimulates the immunity against the flu. **All of our providers, all our staff, and our families (children, too) receive their flu vaccines yearly! The flu vaccines is SAFE, EFFECTIVE, and NECESSARY.** Flu vaccines cannot cause the flu, although side effects for a day can include a flu-like aches and fever.

If your child is **our** patient, you are welcome to call our office for an appointment for the flu vaccine, but realize that the vaccine may not provide protection for a week or more. Go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) to access the Vaccine Information Statements on these vaccines. For the latest information from the RI Department of Health, go to [health.ri.gov](http://health.ri.gov) .

Rhode Islanders should minimize their risk of getting influenza by taking the following steps:

- Wash hands often. Use warm water and soap. Run a humidifier.
- Stay away from sick people. Influenza is spread when infected people cough and sneeze. If you are sick, stay at home. Be sure to cough or sneeze into the elbow of your arm to prevent germ spread.
- During a flu epidemic, call your doctor early if true influenza-like symptoms develop. There may be medications that can be given to minimize the effects of influenza.

**Good Luck!**