

# Influenza

Influenza (also known as the flu) is an infection that can happen in children or adults at any age. It happens more often in the winter months because people spend more time in close contact with one another. Influenza is spread easily from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or touching surfaces.

Because influenza is a virus, it does go away on its own without antibiotics. However, some people can get very sick with influenza, which is why a [vaccine](#) has been created. This is available every year, usually starting in October.

Certain children are at higher risk of getting sicker or developing complications from influenza.

- Children with long term heart and lung diseases.
- Children with diseases causing weakened immune systems.
- Children less than 5 years old.

## Prevention

Influenza is spread easily from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or touching surfaces. You can protect your children from influenza in two main ways:

1. Get the flu [vaccine](#) every year
2. Take actions to control spread of germs:
  - Frequent hand washing with soap and water to help limit the spread of influenza. You can use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when soap and water are not available.
  - Covering your mouth and nose while coughing or sneezing.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth since germs spread this way.
  - Avoid close contact with sick people.



### Seek Immediate Medical Attention if:

- Your child is less than 3 months old with a fever
- Your child looks ill even after fever medication has been given (very sleepy, confused, irritable, or agitated)
- Your child is having trouble breathing
- Your child is severely [dehydrated](#)
- is complaining of headaches with neck pain or stiffness, or light sensitivity
- is lethargic (difficult to keep awake)

[www.ahs.ca/heal](http://www.ahs.ca/heal)

- If you're sick with a flu-like illness you should stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.

## Influenza Vaccine

Influenza viruses change slightly every year so you need a new influenza vaccine before each influenza season.

People who are vaccinated make antibodies (proteins), which will destroy the influenza virus after the person is exposed to the virus. It generally takes about two weeks to make these antibodies. If you do get influenza after being vaccinated, your symptoms are likely to be milder and last for a shorter time compared with people who were not vaccinated. It's best to get the vaccine for you and your family as soon as it's available in the fall to protect you for the rest of the fall and winter months.

For detailed information on the flu vaccine, see these websites:

- <http://www.ahs.ca/influenza>
- <http://immunizealberta.ca>

## Key Points

- Influenza (also known as the flu) is an illness caused by a virus that easily spreads between people.
- The influenza virus usually affects the nose, throat, and lungs.
- It's mostly seen in the winter months.
- Influenza is not treated with antibiotics and will usually go away on its own.
- Certain people are at higher risk of getting very sick with influenza, including young children (less than 5 years old).
- A free influenza vaccine is available to anyone in Alberta 6 months of age or older. The vaccine is safe and effective. For detailed information on the influenza vaccine, see these websites:
  - <http://www.ahs.ca/influenza>
  - <http://immunizealberta.ca>
  - <http://myhealthalberta.ca>

## Symptoms

[www.ahs.ca/heal](http://www.ahs.ca/heal)

Symptoms of influenza can be different from person to person. They include respiratory illness with fever, cough, and one or more of the following:

- sore throat
- headache
- muscle aches and pain
- runny nose
- tired and not wanting to eat or drink

Influenza symptoms usually get better over 2 to 5 days, but the cough and fatigue may last more than a week.

Younger children under 5 years old are at more risk. Pneumonia (lung infection) is the most common complication of the flu.

## Treatment

The treatment of Influenza is focused on improving your child's symptoms. While this will help your child feel better, it will not make the virus go away faster.

- Rest until the symptoms have fully gone away
- Fluids – Have your child drink enough fluids so that they don't become dehydrated. See vomiting and diarrhea section for more information on symptoms of [dehydration](#).
- Acetaminophen and ibuprofen are medications you can use for fever as well as sore throat or muscle pain. See [fever](#) section for more information.
- Cough medicines aren't usually helpful as cough usually goes away without treatment. We don't recommend cough or cold medicine for children under age 6 years of age

Some children need to be admitted into a hospital if they get very sick with the influenza. This is usually because of problems with breathing, pneumonia, or [dehydration](#).

### Know Your Options

It can be scary when your child is sick. But in most cases, you don't need to go to the emergency department. If you're unsure, [we're here to help](#).



### Please Note

The content provided on these pages is not intended to replace medical advice. If you have concerns about the health of your child, contact your health care provider directly. If your child has an emergency, go to the nearest emergency department or call 911. Alberta Health Services and Project HEAL strive to ensure that all material is correct but will not be held liable for errors or incomplete information contained in these pages.