

Influenza (the flu)

Influenza, commonly called the flu, is an infection caused by a strain (version) of the influenza virus. It mainly affects the nose, throat and lungs, although it can involve other parts of the body. In healthy children it is much like a bad cold; however, influenza can cause more serious illness, especially in very young

Signs and symptoms of influenza

Influenza usually begins with a sudden fever and at least two of the following symptoms:

- aches and pains
- headache
- cough or noisy breathing
- sore throat and runny nose
- low energy

nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.

When to see a doctor

If you think your child has influenza, you should see a GP who may want to do a test to confirm if your child has influenza.

Antibiotics are not helpful for influenza because antibiotics do not treat viruses. Your child will only be prescribed antibiotics if they are suspected to also have a bacterial infection.

Influenza can be more serious in children with chronic (long-lasting) medical conditions.

Care at home

Most children recover from influenza within seven days without any treatment. Ensure your child has plenty of bed rest, encourage them to drink lots of fluids and use paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain or discomfort. See our fact sheet [Pain relief for children](#). Do not give aspirin to your child, as this can lead to serious side effects.

If your child becomes more unwell or is showing signs of dehydration or is having difficulty breathing, you should go back to the GP urgently. Some children may need to be admitted to hospital.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is very infectious. It can spread through the air by coughing and sneezing, and by touching objects that have been in contact with saliva or mucus from an infected person. A person with influenza is contagious from the day before symptoms begin until a few days after.

Good hygiene reduces the chance of getting influenza or passing it to others. Good hygiene includes:

- regularly washing hands thoroughly
- not sharing cups or cutlery
- encouraging children to cough or sneeze into their elbow

using tissues instead of hankies – teach your child to throw tissues into the bin as soon as they have used them and to wash their hands afterwards.

If your child has influenza, keep them home from school until they are well again.