



Health Services Newsletter

PREVENTING AND MANAGING THE FLU

Seasonal influenza (flu) is now active in the [United States](#). The flu virus may cause serious illness that may result in hospitalization or death. The flu mostly affects the respiratory system (ears, nose, throat and lungs), but may also affect the whole body. The flu season usually starts in the fall and ends in the spring, although each year is different. People can get the flu more than once per year and many times in their lives. Influenza viruses are **unpredictable, so it's wise to do everything possible to protect yourself, fellow Head Start staff, and children in your program!**

Healthy people can get very sick and sometimes die from influenza. It also is important to remember that the flu may make some people more sick than others. These people include children younger than 2 years of age, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions, such as: asthma, diabetes mellitus, hemodynamically significant cardiac disease, immunosuppression, or neurologic and neurodevelopmental disorders. This is why vaccination remains the most important step in protecting all of us against influenza and its complications. The [flu vaccine](#) is safe, does not cause the flu, and helps prevent spreading the flu from person to person.



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FOR YOUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER

YOU CAN TAILOR THE FOLLOWING TO INCLUDE IN YOUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER

Now is a great time to prepare for the flu season! In addition to getting the flu vaccine, prevent the spread of germs by taking these everyday steps:

- Be sure to cough and sneeze into your elbow or shoulder.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using a tissue or coughing or sneezing.
- Keep surfaces and toys clean. Visit healthychildren.org for information on disinfectants.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu.

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LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO COMBAT THE FLU

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend that all children 6 months and older, especially those with chronic medical conditions, get the seasonal flu vaccine every year.

Influenza virus can be spread in droplets through the air when infected people cough or sneeze, and also from surfaces that infected people touch after the droplets fall from the air. Children and adults can spread the flu virus when they have been infected but are not yet showing symptoms of illness, are developing an illness, or are recovering from an illness.

When children first enter Early Head Start or Head Start programs, they are more vulnerable to infectious diseases because it may be their first exposure to germs that cause common infections. Infants younger than 6 months are too young to receive the flu vaccine, so they need to be protected by having as many people around them as possible (adult staff and children) vaccinated – a process called “cocooning.” This approach lowers the chance that young infants will be exposed to the flu. Children in your program easily pass germs to each other when they put their hands in their mouth, play together, and eat close to one another.

The single-best strategy is to suggest staff, children, and family members be vaccinated every year for seasonal influenza as soon as vaccines are available.

STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Once flu viruses start circulating, it can be very challenging to keep the germs from spreading in your program. Below are steps Head Start programs can take to prepare for seasonal flu outbreaks:

Review program policies on:

- [Hand washing](#)
- [Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting](#).
- Excluding (sending home) [children](#) and [caregivers](#) who are sick.

Schedule influenza prevention [education for staff](#).

Display [educational materials](#) to encourage proper hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette.

Help families and community leaders understand the important roles they can play in reducing the spread of flu.

Update family contact information and [child records](#), so parents can be reached quickly if they need to pick up their sick child.

Encourage all staff, children, and parents to get the flu vaccine as soon as it is available in their community.

Parents should be instructed to keep their children home when ill with fever and respiratory symptoms (runny nose, sore throat, and/or cough).



I'll protect my baby.

I'll get my flu vaccine.

WHEN SHOULD A CHILD BE EXCLUDED FROM CARE?

When reviewing your short-term exclusion policy remember, any child with respiratory symptoms (cough, runny nose, or sore throat) and fever should be excluded from the program. The child can return after the fever has resolved (without the use of fever-reducing medicine), the child is able to participate in normal activities, and staff can care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the other children in the group.

Remember, whenever children are together, there is a chance of spreading infections. This is especially true among infants and toddlers who are likely to use their hands to wipe their noses or rub their eyes and then handle toys or touch other children. These other children then touch their noses and rub their eyes so the virus goes from the nose or eyes of one child by way of hands or toys to the next child who then rubs his own eyes or nose.

Pregnancy and the flu vaccine

Influenza has a greater chance to cause severe illness in pregnant women than in women who are not pregnant. Although pregnant women cannot receive the nasal spray vaccine, millions of pregnant women have received the seasonal flu shot safely over the years.

The flu shot has not been shown to cause harm to pregnant women or their babies.

The flu vaccine is also safe for breastfeeding mothers.

By getting the flu vaccine, pregnant moms can protect their baby after birth for 6 months when babies are too young to get the flu shot.

See the [CDC Seasonal Flu Vaccine Safety and Pregnant Women](#) for more information.



RESOURCES

Caring for Our Children Resources

Caring for Our Children, Standard 3.3.0.1: <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.3>
Caring for Our Children, Standard 3.6.1.1: <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.6.1.1>
Caring for Our Children, Standard 7.3.3: <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/7.3.3>
Caring for Our Children, Standard 7.3.3.1: <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/7.3.3.1>
Caring for Our Children, Standard 7.3.3.2: <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/7.3.3.2>

Other Resources

National Resource Center <http://nrckids.org/index.cfm/resources/state-licensing-and-regulation-information/>
American Academy of Pediatrics, Immunizations & You www.aap.org/immunization

[AAP What's the Latest with the Flu](#)

Free Online Course: Influenza Prevention and Control: Strategies for Early Education and Child Care Providers and other Resources <http://www.healthychildcare.org/flu.html>

Flu Information for Caregivers and Families:

http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/everyday_preventive.pdf

www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/

www.cdc.gov/flu

www.familiesfightingflu.org

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/infantcare.htm>

Fostering a culture of health and wellness for Head Start children, families, and staff.

NATIONAL CENTER ON HEALTH

Our Goal:

To help Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement best practices and effective approaches within medical and dental care access, health awareness, healthy active living, emergency preparedness, and environmental safety to support healthy outcomes and school readiness for young children and their families.

CONTACT US!

The National Center on Health welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to nchinfo@aap.org or call (888) 227-5125.

Subscribe or view all issues of Health Services Newsletter at National Center on Health in Head Start

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center>

School readiness begins with health!

