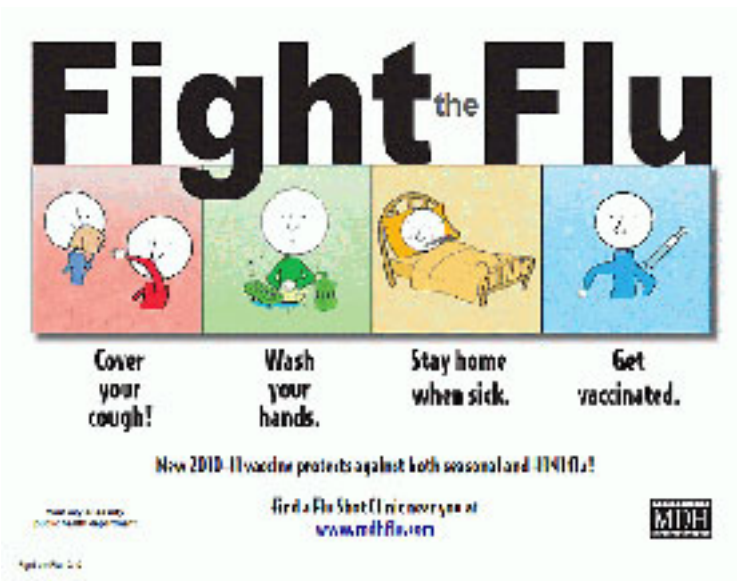


## Influenza: What you need to know

Written by

Monday, 14 October 2013 13:27

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Your child has been home from school for three days with a cough, runny nose, and fever. You've had to miss work to take care of him and are worried that you'll have to miss a couple more days. This is a common situation that families experience during influenza (flu) season because influenza can make people feel miserable for several days or weeks.

Influenza is an illness that affects people of all ages worldwide. Symptoms range from mild to severe, and it is a major health issue around the world. Both children and adults can help fight the spread of influenza each year by getting vaccinated. Vaccination is also one of the best ways to reduce your chance of getting ill.

### What is influenza?

Influenza is an illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Most people get the flu during the colder months, beginning in October and lasting through the spring. Influenza can be spread in the air when people with the virus cough or sneeze, or a person can become infected by touching a surface with the virus on it and then touching their mouth or eyes.

### Who gets influenza?

Anybody can get influenza! But, some people are more likely to become very sick with influenza. Those at highest risk include: young children, people 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, and people who are already sick with diseases like pneumonia, asthma, chronic lung disease, HIV, heart disease and diabetes.

### What are the signs and symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms include a sore throat, runny nose, and cough. People with influenza also feel very tired and may have a fever, chills, and body aches. Children who have influenza may have different symptoms than adults, like diarrhea and vomiting in addition to the other symptoms. Influenza symptoms usually come on very suddenly.

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### How is influenza treated?

Most of the time, influenza can be treated at home. It is important to rest and to drink plenty of water. Stay home while you are sick and for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone so you do not spread the flu to others. Sometimes influenza can be severe. If a person is having trouble breathing, feeling dizzy or confused or having chest or abdominal pain they should go to the hospital. In some cases doctors may also give medications to help your body fight the virus.

### How can I prevent influenza?

The most important way to prevent influenza is to get vaccinated! Everyone 6 months of age and older should get the influenza vaccine *every year*. The influenza vaccine reduces the chances of getting sick.

The vaccine may be given as a shot in the arm or as a spray in the nose. Talk with your doctor if you have an egg allergy or if you have had a reaction to the vaccine in the past. As the influenza season is approaching, it is important to get vaccinated now!

Other ways to avoid getting sick are:

- Clean your hands often with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, if possible.

You can search for a location to get influenza vaccine at [www.mdhflu.com](http://www.mdhflu.com) and click on "Vaccine Clinic Look-Up." This site also includes information on clinics in Minnesota that offer free or low-cost vaccines for children and adults who do not have insurance or whose insurance does not cover immunizations.

*Source: Minnesota Department of Health*