



# Health Services Newsletter

## Preventing and Managing The Flu

Most young children are enrolled in early education and child care programs. Head Start and other child care programs can take steps to prevent and control influenza. Anyone, even healthy children and adults, can get very sick, need to be hospitalized, and even die from influenza, so prevention efforts are important! **Everyone six months and older should get the flu vaccine.**

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 and child care staff, and the infant, toddlers and young children in your program!

It is important to remember that the flu may make some people sicker than others. Children younger than 2 years of age, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions (e.g., asthma, diabetes mellitus, hemodynamically significant cardiac disease [like congenital heart disease], immunosuppression, or neurologic and neurodevelopmental disorders [like cerebral palsy]) are all at increased risk. This is why vaccination remains the most important step in protecting the community against influenza and its complications. Remember, it takes about two weeks after vaccination to develop antibodies for protection against the flu

It is key that **all caregivers and staff be vaccinated against the flu each year.** Influenza vaccination is also recommended for all [pregnant women in any trimester](#), as well as women who are breastfeeding or who plan to become pregnant during the influenza season. Besides protecting themselves, pregnant women who are vaccinated, pass their protection from the influenza virus to their newborns who cannot receive the flu vaccine until they are six months old.



### Inside this issue

- Preventing and Managing the Flu..... 1
- Children in Early Care and Education Setting Are a Priority .....2
- Examples of what Early Education and Child Care Programs can do to increase Influenza Immunization .....2
- Strategies to Stop the Spread of Germs .....2
- When should a child be excluded from the early care and education setting.....3
- Misconceptions about the Flue Vaccine .....3
- Related Caring for Our Children Standards..... 4
- Other Resources .....4



### Examples of what Early Education and Child Care Programs can do to Increase Influenza Immunization

- Offer free flu immunizations to employees (provide vaccinations onsite, reimburse any out-of-pocket expenses, or give gift cards to places that vaccinate adults).
- Request a nurse from an office or a health center to come offer flu vaccinations on site at the center.
- Directors can encourage employees to take a “flu quiz” to see how much they know. The CDC has created a quick 10 question quiz, available here: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluiq.htm>.
- Put up CDC posters and circulate FAQs to staff before offering flu vaccines onsite to encourage dialogue and participation. For CDC posters, click here: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/freeresources/print.htm>.
- Have health consultant/health professionals talk individually with staff before flu vaccines are offered onsite to address questions.

## Children in Early Care and Education Settings Are a Priority

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. This is the first and most important step for children in protecting against the flu!

Influenza viruses are shared or “transmitted” in droplets that form when someone coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land on another person’s eyes, nose, or mouth or fall on surfaces that are touched by another person who then places their hands in their mouths or around their nose or mouth. 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. This is the same for the flu virus. Children and adults can spread the flu virus when they are developing an illness or are recovering from an illness, and even when they have been infected but are not yet showing symptoms of illness.

When children first enter early education and child care programs, they are more vulnerable to infectious diseases because this may be the first time they are exposed to germs that cause common childhood illnesses. In addition, infants younger than 6 months are too young to receive the flu vaccine, so they need to be protected by having as many vaccinated people around them (staff and children)—a process called “cocooning.” This approach lowers the chance that young infants will be exposed to the flu.

### Strategies to Stop the Spread of Germs

Once flu season starts, it can be challenging to keep the germs from spreading in your program. Below are steps Head Start and child care programs can take to reduce the spread of seasonal flu:

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

*The single-best strategy to combat the flu is to make sure that all staff, children, and family members are vaccinated every year for seasonal influenza as soon as vaccines are available.*



- Review and implement program policies on:
  - [Hand washing](#)
  - [Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting](#)
  - Excluding (sending home) [children](#) and [caregivers](#) who are sick.
  - [Cough and Sneeze Etiquette](#)
- Help families understand the important roles they can play in reducing the spread of flu. Remind families that they can implement the same policies the program has implemented in their own homes.
- Schedule influenza prevention [education or workshops for staff](#).
- Display [educational materials](#) to encourage proper hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette. Preschool-aged children can and should be taught to cover their mouths and noses with a tissue when they cough or sneeze.
- Update family contact information in each child's records.

### **When should a child be excluded from the early care and education setting?**

Early care and education programs should develop an exclusion policy that describes when children should stay at home if they become sick. It will be important to review this policy with parents so they know that the program staff will make the final decision about whether children who are ill may stay based on the program's criteria and their ability to care for the child who is ill without compromising the care of other children in the program.

### **Misconceptions about the Flu Vaccine**

A number of fears about the flu vaccine have grown over the years, causing some adults to avoid getting it. These fears range from questions about vaccine safety to concerns about its overall effectiveness. Laboratory data shows that the viruses circulating in communities match the strains covered in the [2015-2016 influenza vaccines](#).

The flu vaccine cannot cause influenza; however, it can cause mild side effects in some people (body aches, injection site soreness, low grade fever). The flu vaccine takes 2 weeks to begin to provide good protection, so when someone becomes ill right after being vaccinated, they sometimes mistakenly believe the vaccine "gave" them the virus. That's why it's possible for adults or children to be vaccinated but get still get the flu or another virus that causes similar symptoms, within the two weeks after receiving the flu vaccine. See the CDC fact sheet "[No More Excuses: You Need a Flu Vaccine](#)" for more information.



## Related Caring for Our Children Standards

[Inclusion/Exclusion/Dismissal of Children](#)

[Influenza Control](#)

[Influenza Immunizations for Children and Caregivers/Teachers](#)

[Routine Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting](#)

### Other Resources

[American Academy of Pediatrics, Immunizations & You](#)

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

[AAP Influenza Prevention and Control Resources](#)

[Influenza Prevention and Control: Strategies for Early Education and Child Care Programs](#)

[Head Start Emergency Preparedness Manual: 2015 Edition](#)

[Health Tips for Home Visitors to Prevent the Spread of Illness](#)

[Managing Infectious Disease in Head Start](#)

[CDC Everyday Preventive Actions That Can Help Fight Germs, Like Flu](#)

[Prevent Childhood Influenza](#)

[CDC Influenza \(Flu\)](#)

[Families Fighting Flu](#)

[CDC Protecting Against Influenza \(Flu\): Advice for Caregivers of Young Children](#)



**NATIONAL CENTER ON**  
**Early Childhood Health and Wellness**

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [health@ecetta.info](mailto:health@ecetta.info) or call (888) 227-5125.

Subscribe or view all issues of Health Services Newsletter on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/newsletters/newsletters.html>.

***School readiness begins with health!***