

Influenza Information for Child Care



Facts about Influenza

Symptoms:

- Fever (usually high; very common symptom)
- Feeling feverish or having chills
- Headache (common)
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches (very common, often severe)
- Diarrhea and vomiting (less common: occurs more often among children than adults)

How it spreads:

The flu virus is usually spread when someone with the flu coughs, sneezes, or talks near another person. Tiny droplets from the infected person land in another person's mouth or nose, or are breathed into their lungs. The droplets can spread about six feet out from the coughing or sneezing person. Additionally, the infectious droplets land on surfaces and can remain infectious for as long as 4 days.

You may be able to pass on the flu virus even before you know you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms appear and 5 to 7 days after noticing symptoms. Children may shed higher levels of influenza virus and may shed for more than 7 days.

Flu vs. Cold vs. Norovirus

Influenza and the common cold are caused by different viruses. The cold virus and the flu virus cause many common symptoms, so sometimes it can be hard to tell at first if someone is sick with a cold or the flu. Although both diseases share symptoms such as runny nose, congestion, or a cough, influenza will generally make people feel much, much worse. Hallmark signs of influenza often include a high fever, body aches, and feeling extremely tired, which are not typically seen with cold viruses. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. The flu can.

Cold viruses and flu viruses are spread in similar ways: through droplets that infected people sneeze or cough, and by touching surfaces when the infectious droplets are on them. Because of this, when you take measures to protect yourself from flu, you are also protecting yourself from common colds.

The term "stomach flu" is often used to describe symptoms of nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, but it is not an accurate term. Many different viruses, bacteria, or even parasites can cause these symptoms. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being "sick to your stomach" (nauseated) can *sometimes* be related to influenza— more commonly in children than adults — very *rarely* are they the primary symptoms of influenza illness. Influenza is a respiratory disease and *not* a stomach or intestinal disease. The most common cause of foodborne diarrhea and vomiting in the US is norovirus. Below is a chart comparing influenza with cold viruses and with norovirus.

Flu vs Cold vs Norovirus			
Signs & Symptoms	Influenza	Cold	Norovirus
Symptom start	Abruptly	Gradually	Abruptly, usually ending within 48 hours
Fever	Usual, often high	Rare	Sometimes
Aches	Usual, often severe	Slight	Sometimes
Chills	Fairly common	Not Common	Sometimes
Fatigue	Usual	Sometimes	Sometimes
Stuffy Nose	Sometimes	Common	Not a symptom
Sore Throat	Sometimes	Common	Not a symptom
Cough/Chest Discomfort	Common, can be severe	Common, mild to moderate	Not a symptom
Headache	Very common	Rare	Sometimes
Vomiting and Diarrhea	Rare, esp. in adults. May be more likely in children	Not a symptom	Typical

Preventing Influenza

Preventing Influenza

1) Get a flu vaccine

- To protect from the seasonal flu, encourage all program staff to get vaccinated for the flu each year. It is especially important for staff members who work with children less than 6 months of age to get vaccinated since infants younger than 6 months are too young to receive the vaccination themselves.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Snohomish Health District **recommend that anyone at least 6 months of age receive the seasonal flu vaccine** (except for rare occasions when a health care professional has identified a contraindication). When flu season is approaching, gently remind parents of the importance of protecting their children.

2) Watch for symptoms and exclude

- Watch children and staff for signs of illness. Conduct **daily health checks** of children and staff. If a person seems sick, take their temperature and ask about symptoms.
- Encourage staff to stay home if they are sick with flu-like symptoms. Encourage parents to keep children home if they are sick with flu-like symptoms. Staff and children need to stay home until they are free of fever for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Communicate and instruct ill staff and parents of sick children to get medical care for themselves or for their children immediately if they are at a higher risk of flu complications, if they are concerned about their illness, or if symptoms are severe.

3) Maintain a clean and healthy environment through sanitation

- Proper hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs, including the flu virus.
- Routinely wash, rinse, and sanitize surfaces and items that children frequently touch with their hands or mouths, or that come in contact with their body fluids. Allow adequate contact time for the sanitizer to work.
- Open windows periodically to flush out germs and replenish the rooms with fresh air.
- It is appropriate to **disinfect** high touch surfaces like doorknobs or counter edges.



4) Follow respiratory etiquette

- Educate staff and children about covering coughs and sneezes and providing plenty of reminders
- Wash hands after blowing your nose, sneezing into hands or a tissue, or wiping a child's nose
- Provide easy access to tissues and trash cans.
- Remind children and staff to keep their hands away from their eyes, nose, and mouth.

5) Practice social distancing

- Social distancing refers to measures which decrease the contact between people in an effort to prevent the spread of disease from sick to healthy individuals.
- Avoid combining classrooms including at the opening and closing, and avoid events that bring children from different classrooms into a large group
- Increase outdoor time
- Divide classes into smaller groups
- Move play areas or activity centers further apart and increase space between children when they are sitting in a circle, at the snack table, or napping if possible.
- Move children and staff who become sick to a separate, supervised space which keeps them at least 6 feet away from others until they can be sent home
- Limit the number of staff who take care of the sick child in order to limit exposure to the virus



6) Educate and prepare

- Share information on influenza immunization and exclusion guidelines with staff and families
- Create a plan for managing staff absences from illness
- Encourage families to have alternative care plans if their child becomes sick or if the child care closes.
- Teach children how to wash hands and cover their coughs and sneezes.
- Report outbreaks of illness to Snohomish Health District at 425.339.5278.

**For more information on flu prevention for your child care, please contact
Snohomish Health District's Child Care Health Outreach Program
at 425.252.5415 or childcarehealth@snohd.org.**