

The Flu: A Guide For Parents

Ramsey School District Health Services Dept.



What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two types of illnesses have similar symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone.

In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu.

What is the Flu?

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing.

How does the flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching something that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults). Some people with the flu will not have a fever. How long can a sick person spread the flu to others? People with the flu may be able to infect others by shedding virus from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and may be still contagious past 5 to 7 days of flu illness, especially if they still have symptoms (CDC, 2015).

What are some of the other ways I can protect my child against the flu?

In addition to getting vaccinated, you and your children can take everyday steps to help prevent the spread of germs. These include:

- ◆ **CDC recommends that your sick child stay home for at least 24 hours after his or her fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever reducing medicine.**
- ◆ Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after it has been used.
- ◆ Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- ◆ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- ◆ Clean and disinfect hard surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs.

