

When Your Child is Sick with Uncomplicated Influenza

This fact sheet provides information for parents and caregivers about managing signs and symptoms of uncomplicated influenza at home.

Influenza in Children

Older children and teens have the same symptoms of influenza as adults, including fever, headache, chills and pains, fatigue, stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat and cough.

Children under age 5 usually present with sudden onset of fever and cough. Infants are less likely to cough and will frequently have only nonspecific signs such as poor feeding, apnea high fever or very low body temperature.

Younger children – particularly children under 6 months old – may also have diarrhea, vomiting and stomach pain.

Very young children and infants probably have aches and pains but do not know how to tell people they have head, body or stomach pain. They may be irritable and eat poorly. They sometimes develop a hoarse cry and barking cough (croup).

What You Can Do For Your Child:

- Give acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever and muscle pain in the dose recommended on the package (unless your doctor says otherwise). **DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN or ASA.** Children under 18 should not take acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) or products containing ASA.
- Your pharmacist can provide advice on appropriate over-the-counter medications for treating fever.
- Do not expect to be prescribed antibiotics for uncomplicated influenza, as they will not help. Antibiotics may be prescribed for complications of influenza such as pneumonia or ear infection.

- Dress the child in lightweight clothing and keep the room temperature at 20°C.
- Offer cool fluids frequently when the child is awake. Extra fluids are needed to replace what is lost in sweating. If your child's urine is darker than usual, he/she needs more to drink.
- Avoid cool baths.
- Allow the child to rest and stay at home if possible for 6 days or more, so the virus isn't spread to other children.
- Use salt-water or saline nose drops to treat a stuffy nose.
- Teach the child to cover his/her mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then to throw the tissue away.
- Wash hands often with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and teach your child to do the same.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper arm, not into your hands, and teach your child to do the same.
- Don't share eating utensils (e.g., cups or straws), toothbrushes or towels with your child.

When to Seek Medical Care

There are two decision-making tools to help you decide when to seek medical care:

- When to seek medical care for an infant or young child under 6 years old with influenza-like illness
- When to seek medical care for a **child from 6 to 16 years old** with influenza-like illness

For more information:

Call Telehealth

- 1-866-797-0000;
- TTY: 1-866-797-0007

Source: Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic - August 2008
Chapter #18A: Paediatric Services Tools 18A-1