

Letter to Parents: Influenza

Date: _____

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Flu season is here, and the **(name of center/program)** wants to keep your children and the adults who care for them healthy.

Influenza (“the flu”) is an infectious disease caused by a virus. When children are in a group with other children, they are more likely to get infectious diseases like influenza. The flu virus can cause serious illness that may result in hospitalization or death. Children with certain conditions are at high risk for complications from the flu, but most children who get the flu are healthy. Even one death from the flu is too many – it’s very important for us to work together to protect the children in our care!

The single best way to protect against influenza is to get vaccinated *each year* because protection against the flu wears off over time. In addition, the flu strains in the vaccine often change from year-to-year in order to match the flu viruses expected to be circulating in the community.

To reduce the risk of becoming sick with influenza, everyone 6 months of age and older, including child care staff, must receive the influenza vaccine. This critically important approach puts the health and safety of everyone in the child care setting first.

Here are some ways we can work together to promote health and reduce illness.

Get Vaccinated for Influenza Every Year

A flu vaccine is the best way to protect against getting the flu.

- All people 6 months of age and older need a flu vaccine each year.
- Pregnant women are at higher risk of severe illness from influenza. Flu shots may be given to pregnant women at any time during pregnancy. The flu vaccine will protect expectant mothers and their developing baby and will help protect their newborn in the first few months of life.
- Babies cannot get vaccinated until they are 6 months old. That’s why it is critical that people who live with or care for these young infants get vaccinated. (This is called “cocooning” -- when you protect babies by having those around them get vaccinated).
- Everyone should get the flu shot this season. Though a flu vaccine sprayed up the nose has been offered in the past, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continue to not recommend the intranasal vaccine because it has not protected people well from the flu during the past few years.

You may be interested to know that we encourage all of our staff to get vaccinated for the flu!

Use Good Hygiene

Whenever children are together, there is a chance of spreading infections. This is especially true among infants and toddlers who use their hands to wipe their noses or rub their eyes and then

handle toys or touch other children. As adults, we know to wash our hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing, sneezing, or wiping noses. It's also important to cover your own mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then wash your hands afterward. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, as germs are easily spread this way. The **(Name of center)** works hard to maintain these practices, and we spend time teaching the children to do them as well. Please help us by reinforcing good hygiene at home!

Is Your Child Too Sick to Go to Child Care?

When children are healthy, they can attend child care or school, and parents can go to work. Getting the flu vaccine is the best way to make sure everyone can continue to participate in these important activities. However, any child with respiratory symptoms (cough, runny nose, or sore throat) and fever should stay home and not attend their child care program.

The child can return:

- after the fever has resolved (without the use of fever-reducing medicine);
- the child is able to participate in normal activities; and
- the staff can care for the child without compromising how well they are able to care for the other children in the group.

Below is a reminder of our guidelines.

(add guidelines here)

Thank you for everything you do to help us keep your child safe and healthy! If you have questions, please talk with **(name of program contact)** or see the resources below.

Sincerely,

(name of program contact)
(phone number/e-mail address)

RESOURCES

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.healthychildren.org (English)

www.healthychildren.org/spanish (Spanish)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.flu.gov/

National Foundation for Infectious Diseases/Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition

www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/

Families Fighting Flu

www.familiesfightingflu.org/