

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. Children with certain conditions are at high risk for complications from the flu, but most children who get the flu are healthy. The flu virus can cause serious illness that may result in hospitalization or death. 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 are often changed from one year to the next 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 all caretakers, parents, child care staff, and all others who will be in close contact with young children, 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 you 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. 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 their parents and siblings, and anyone who will live with or care for these young infants get vaccinated. (This is called “cocooning” -- when you protect babies by having everyone around them get vaccinated).
- For the 2018-2019 season, the AAP recommends the flu shot as the primary vaccine choice for all children. In addition to the shot, though, the nasal spray vaccine is once again available. The AAP recommends the nasal spray vaccine only be used if the child would otherwise not get a flu vaccination, but this vaccine is only for children older than 2 years of age who are healthy, with no medical conditions.

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 gone away (without the use of fever-reducing medicine);
- the child is able to do his 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/