Influenza Prevention and Control

Information for Caregivers and Teachers

What is influenza?
Influenza, known more commonly as "the flu," is an infectious disease caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, and lungs). Unlike the common cold, the flu can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications. Some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from flu, including children younger than 5 years of age and children of any age with certain chronic health conditions, including asthma or other lung disorders, heart disease, or a neurologic or neurodevelopmental disorder. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May or June. The period of illness usually peaks between late December and March but the level of activity and severity of the virus is not predictable – every year is different. During the 2012-2013 flu season, 60 percent of deaths occurred in children who were at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications, but 40 percent of these children had no recognized chronic health problems. This is consistent with what has been seen in previous years.

How does the flu spread?
Whenever children are together, there is a chance of spreading infections. This is especially true among infants and toddlers who are likely to use their hands to wipe their noses or rub their eyes and then handle toys or touch other children. These children then touch their noses and rub their eyes so the virus goes from the nose or eyes of one child by way of hands or toys to the next child who then rubs his own eyes or nose. The flu spreads through:

- Direct contact with secretions from sneezing and coughing.
- Indirect contact from contaminated hands and other items (such as surfaces and toys).

To reduce the spread of germs, it is important to review and update your current policies and procedures on hand washing and cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting surfaces and toys.

What are the signs or symptoms of the flu?

- Fever
- Cough
- Headache
- Chills
- Muscle aches and pains
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Decreased energy
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (when seen alone, these symptoms are often caused by other factors, not the influenza virus.)
- Pneumonia

Each year, some children are hospitalized and die from flu complications. Some of these children have special health care needs, while others do not. Even healthy children can die from influenza complications.

Flu prevention:
Children 6 months and older should receive an annual flu vaccine, which is the best way to protect against influenza. Parents/guardians of children 6 months and older should provide written documentation that each child has received the current annual flu vaccination unless there is a medical
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reason or philosophical or religious objection. Children who are too young to receive the flu vaccine before the start of influenza season should be vaccinated as soon as they reach 6 months of age. Children younger than 9 years old who are being vaccinated for the first time need to get two doses of vaccine the first season they are vaccinated. It is very important for children to receive the second dose this first year, as this boosts the child’s immune system to ensure optimal protection against the flu. The best way to protect children younger than 6 months old is for the mother to be vaccinated while pregnant, and for caregivers of the infant to be vaccinated as soon as feasible, once vaccine becomes available.

All staff caring for children should receive yearly flu vaccines. Ideally people should get the flu vaccine before the start of the influenza season, in August or September. Influenza has been known to still circulate into May and June.

**Flu vaccines:**
There are 2 types of flu vaccines:
- The “flu shot” – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) given with a needle – is approved for people 6 months or older, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine – made with live, weakened flu virus – is approved for use in healthy people, 2-49 years of age, who are not pregnant and do not have any chronic medical conditions, including asthma.

**Possible vaccine side effects:**
Different side effects can be associated with the flu shot and the nasal spray. Some minor side effects that could occur with the flu shot are: soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given; low-grade fever; and aches. If these problems occur, they typically begin soon after the shot was given and usually last 1 to 2 days. Possible side effects with the nasal spray could include mild cold-like symptoms, such as headache, cough, sore throat, tiredness/weakness, irritability, and muscle aches. You cannot get the flu from either type of flu vaccine. Very rarely, a vaccine may cause serious problems, such as a severe allergic reaction.

**Should a child with the flu be excluded from care?**
Any child with respiratory symptoms (cough, runny nose, or sore throat) and fever should be excluded from 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 staff can care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the other children in the group. To reduce the risk of becoming sick with influenza, child care providers and all the children being cared for must receive all recommended immunizations, including influenza vaccine. The single best way to protect against influenza is to get vaccinated each year. This critically important approach puts the health and safety of everyone in the child care setting first. Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older, including child care staff and pregnant women.
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Resources:
Caring for Our Children, Standard 3.2.2.2: Handwashing Procedure
http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.2.2.2

Caring for Our Children, Standard 3.3.0.1: Routine Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting
http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.3

Caring for Our Children, Standard 7.3.3.1: Influenza Immunizations for Children and Caregivers/Teachers
http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/7.3.3.1

Caring for Our Children, Standard 7.3.3.2: Influenza Control
http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/7.3.3.2

For information about the flu vaccine:
www.aap.org/immunization
http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm

Flu information for caregivers and families:
www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/
www.cdc.gov/flu

Advice for caregivers of young children:
http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/infantcare.htm

References: