Influenza, Child

Influenza (‘the flu’) is a viral infection of the respiratory tract. It occurs in outbreaks every year, usually in the cold months.

CAUSES

Influenza is caused by a virus. There are three types of influenza: A, B and C. It is very contagious. This means it spreads easily to others. Influenza spreads in tiny droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. It usually spreads from person to person. People can pick up influenza by touching something that was recently contaminated with the virus and then touching their mouth or nose.

This virus is contagious one day before symptoms appear. It is also contagious for up to five days after becoming ill. The time it takes to get sick after exposure to the infection (incubation period) can be as short as 2 to 3 days.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms can vary depending on the age of the child and the type of influenza. Your child may have any of the following:

- Fever.
- Chills.
- Body aches.
- Headaches.
- Sore throat.
- Runny and/or congested nose.
- Cough.
- Poor appetite.
- Weakness, feeling tired.
- Dizziness.
- Nausea, vomiting.

The fever, chills, fatigue and aches can last for up to 4 to 5 days. The cough may last for a week or two. Children may feel weak or tire easily for a couple of weeks.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of influenza is often made based on the history and physical exam. Testing can be done if the diagnosis is not certain.

TREATMENT

Since influenza is a virus, antibiotics are not helpful. Your child’s caregiver may prescribe antiviral medicines to shorten the illness and lessen the severity. Your child’s caregiver may also recommend influenza vaccination and/or antiviral medicines for other family members in order to prevent the spread of influenza to them.

Annual flu shots are the best way to avoid getting influenza.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN TO CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE WITH INFLUENZA. This could lead to brain and liver damage (Reye's syndrome). Read the label on over-the-counter medicines.
- Use a cool mist humidifier to increase air moisture if you live in a dry climate. Do not use hot steam.
- Have your child rest until the temperature is normal. This usually takes 3 to 4 days.

- Drink enough water and fluids to keep your urine clear or pale yellow.
- Use cough syrups if recommended by your child's caregiver. Always check before giving cough and cold medicines to children under the age of 4 years.
- Clean mucus from young children's noses, if needed, by gentle suction with a bulb syringe.
- Wash your and your child's hands often to prevent the spread of germs. This is especially important after blowing the nose and before touching food. Be sure your child covers their mouth when they cough or sneeze.
- Keep your child home from day care or school until the fever has been gone for 1 day.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR CHILD HAS:

- Ear pain (in young children and babies this may cause crying and waking at night).
- Chest pain.
- Cough that is worsening or causing vomiting.
- Your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C).
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 100.5º F (38.1° C) or higher for more than 1 day.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR CHILD HAS:

- Trouble breathing or fast breathing.
- Signs of dehydration:
  - Confusion or decreased alertness.
  - Tiredness and sluggishness (*lethargy*).
  - Rapid breathing or pulse.
  - Weakness or limpness.
  - Sunken eyes.
  - Pale skin.
  - Dry mouth.
  - No tears when crying.
  - No urine for 8 hours.
- Confusion or unusual sleepiness.
- Convulsions (*seizures*).
- Severe neck pain or stiffness.
- Severe headache.
- Severe muscle pain or swelling.
- Your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your baby is 3 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**

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