



5 June 2019

Health Centre Update: Influenza

What is influenza and signs and symptoms?

Influenza, commonly called the flu, is an infection caused by a strain (version) of the influenza virus. It mainly affects the nose, throat and lungs. In healthy children it is much like a bad cold.

People infected with influenza are considered infectious from one day before onset of symptoms and up to seven days after onset of symptoms. Young children may be active for longer, possibly from seven to 10 days.

Influenza usually begins with a sudden fever and at least two of the following symptoms:

- aches and pains
- headache
- cough or noisy breathing
- sore throat and runny nose
- low energy
- nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

How it can be prevented?

Influenza is very infectious. It can spread through the air by coughing and sneezing, and by touching objects that have been in contact with saliva or mucus from an infected person.

Good hygiene reduces the chance of getting influenza or passing it to others. Good hygiene includes:

- washing hands with soap and running water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub, after sneezing, coughing or touching used tissues;
- not sharing cups or cutlery;
- encouraging children to cough or sneeze into their elbow;
- using tissues instead of hankies – teach your child to throw tissues into the bin as soon as they have used them and to wash their hands afterwards.

Your GP may recommend the influenza vaccine for it is the most effective way to reduce the chance of your child becoming sick with influenza. The vaccine can be given to any child over six months of age.

What should be done?

If you think your child has influenza, you should see a GP who may want to do a throat swab test to confirm if your child has contracted influenza.

Furthermore, contact your GP urgently if your child has been confirmed with influenza and becomes more unwell, or shows signs of dehydration or breathing difficulties.

Antibiotics are not helpful for influenza because antibiotics do not treat viruses. Your child will only be prescribed antibiotics if they are suspected to also have a bacterial infection.

Influenza can be more serious in children with chronic (long-lasting) medical conditions, including:

- chronic respiratory conditions (including asthma)
- chronic heart disease
- chronic neurological or metabolic conditions
- chronic kidney or liver problems
- diabetes mellitus.

Care at home

Most children and adults recover from uncomplicated influenza within seven days without any treatment, although the cough and fatigue may last longer.

Ensure your child has plenty of bed rest and encourage them to drink lots of fluids.

If your child becomes more unwell or is showing signs of dehydration or is having difficulty breathing, you should go back to the GP urgently. Some children may need to be admitted to hospital.

When can a child return to school?

If your child has influenza, keep them home from School, until they are well again and without a fever for 24 hours.

References

Please refer to these health websites for further information:

SA Health: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne: www.rch.org.au