

# What Parents Need to Know About The Flu and Meningococcal Meningitis

Influenza, commonly called “the flu”, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza viruses. Infection with this virus can result in illness ranging from mild to potentially life-threatening problems.

## Flu Facts

- Children at greatest risk include those who live in long-term care facilities or have the following medical conditions; heart disease, lung disease (such as asthma), kidney disease, metabolic disease (such as diabetes), blood disorders (such as anemia), weakened immune systems (such as HIV), those who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy.
- Symptoms of flu include fever (usually high), headaches, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are much more common among children than adults.
- Flu is commonly spread through coughing, sneezing, sharing food/ drinks, or inhaled through the air.
- Treatments include plenty of rest and fluids. Decongestants, cough suppressants, and use of a humidifier can relieve some symptoms.

Meningococcal Meningitis is a form of bacterial meningitis and is sometimes called spinal meningitis. It is rare, but is a potentially fatal infection that can cause severe swelling of the fluid around the brain and spinal cord, or a serious blood infection.

## Meningitis Facts

- Certain college students are especially at risk due to certain social behaviors, including drinking, smoking (active and passive) and being in crowded situations like a dormitory.
- Symptoms can progress rapidly and may resemble the flu. They can include fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, confusion, sleepiness, and light sensitivity. Some people also develop a rash mainly on their arms and legs.
- The disease is spread through the air or by contact with saliva, usually through close, personal contact with an infected person. The disease can be spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing, or shared items like a drinking glass, eating utensils or cigarettes.

Vaccines are available for both the flu and meningococcal meningitis. The flu vaccine is taken annually and the meningitis vaccine protects for almost 3-5 years. While vaccinations remain the primary way to prevent these illnesses the following measures are helpful:

- Frequent handwashing using soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Cover mouths when coughing or sneezing. Keep tissues handy and discard promptly when used.
- Get plenty of rest nightly. Eat healthy meals which include fruits and vegetables daily.
- Do not share food, beverages, or eating utensils.
- Encourage sick children to stay home to prevent spreading illnesses to others. Students can return to school when they're without a fever for 24 hours.

For additional information on the diseases and the vaccines visit the following web sites at:

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.immunizenc.com](http://www.immunizenc.com), [www.acha.org](http://www.acha.org), or [www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)