



Infection in Children

What is influenza infection?

Influenza or commonly termed 'flu' is respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. There are two main types of influenza virus (types A and B) causing seasonal flu epidemics each year. Occasional pandemics occur due to Influenza A virus of animal origin (birds, pigs etc.).

How does the infection spread between people?

When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the droplets containing the virus are released into the surroundings. Other people might get infected by breathing in air containing the infectious droplets or coming into contact with contaminated surfaces.



What are the symptoms of flu?

Children with flu can have symptoms like fever, cold, cough, sore throat, fatigue, headache, and body pains. Some children may also have vomiting & diarrhoea. Severe infections can lead to pneumonia (high fever, breathing difficulties) and involvement of other organs like the heart and brain. Severe infections leading to hospitalization and death might be seen in the high-risk groups.

SYMPTOMS OF FLU



What are the high-risk groups for flu infections?

The following groups of individuals are of greatest risk for flu infections?

- Infants and children under 5 years age
- Elderly patients
- People with underlying chronic diseases involving the heart, lungs, nervous system, kidneys, diabetes etc.
- Immunodeficiency disorders: primary (inherited) or secondary (HIV, patients on long term steroids, cancer drugs etc.)
- Pregnancy
- Obesity
- Health care workers

How is the condition diagnosed?

Diagnosis is confirmed by the above symptoms and when needed with investigations like antigen detection, RT-PCR etc.

What is the treatment advised for flu infection?

Symptomatic treatment: Treatment of fever/body pains with medicines like paracetamol, ensuring adequate fluid intake etc. is done in mild cases and people with no underlying risk factors.

Anti-viral therapy: Drugs like oseltamivir may be considered in severe infections and people with underlying risk factors.

These provide maximum benefit when taken early (within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms).



How can people prevent the spread of infection?

The spread of infection can be prevented by covering nose and mouth during coughing and sneezing. In addition, appropriate hand hygiene is also important. People with suspected symptoms should isolate themselves to prevent the spread to others. The most effective way to prevent infection is by taking the flu vaccination.

What are the advantages of taking the flu vaccines?

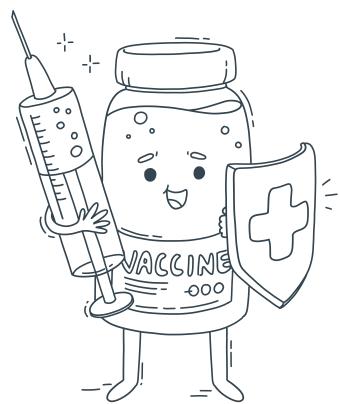
According to the WHO, every year 3 to 5 million cases of severe illness, and about 3 to 6 million deaths are attributed to flu infection. Apart from these, flu epidemics also cause absenteeism from school and work. Apart from preventing the above problems, vaccination will also prevent overburdening of the health system which is already stretched due to COVID pandemic.

When should the vaccinations be taken?

In most parts of India, flu occurs throughout the year with peak occurrence in the rainy season. The vaccine therefore should preferably be taken few weeks before the onset of rainy season.

Why should the vaccines be taken every year?

As the antibody levels in the body following vaccination decrease over a period of time and as new vaccines are made every year, these have to be taken once a year. The yearly flu vaccines are made based on the data on common circulating flu viruses across the world. These vaccines are available as Northern and Southern hemisphere vaccines.



Which vaccine should preferably be taken?

Flu vaccines are available as trivalent &and quadrivalent vaccines. The quadrivalent vaccine (that contains 2 strains of Influenza A and 2 strains of Influenza B) should preferably be taken. The WHO recommends Southern hemisphere vaccine for India.

What are the current recommendations for flu vaccination in children?

The IAP (Indian academy of paediatrics) has the following recommendations for flu vaccination in children:

Minimum age for vaccination is 6 months (inactivated vaccine).

Two doses with 1 month gap are recommended when taking for the first time.

Subsequently the vaccine is recommended to be taken once a year until 5 years age.

Above 5 years, the vaccine is recommended in the high-risk group of patients.

Will flu vaccine protect against Covid?

Although there are few studies suggesting that people vaccinated with flu were less likely to test positive or have serious complications related to Covid disease, larger scientific studies are needed to say whether flu vaccine protects against Covid or not. Until then flu vaccine should be taken for protection against flu infection.

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