

Report to PARENTS

Fight Flu and Germs

You've probably already heard it: the telltale sniffles of flu season, which peaks in January and February. Navigate flu and germ season with these tactics for prevention and care.

About the Vaccine

Though it's best to get vaccinated in the fall, it's not too late to get a flu shot at the start of winter. Everyone age six months and older can receive the vaccine, which is available as a shot or nasal spray. Children are at a higher risk for the flu, since their immune systems are developing. It's especially important to vaccinate children younger than 5 and those with chronic health conditions. Don't forget to get vaccinated yourself!

If you're not sure where to get a flu shot, ask your principal or school nurse for information on clinics or community agencies that may be providing flu shots.

If Your Child Is Sick

Children who can't keep their eyes open, even after having a normal night's sleep, may be coming down with something. Add an "achy" feeling and loss of appetite, and it's likely that the flu is on the way. If, before school, you think your child may be starting to get sick, alert the teacher and make sure an adult is available for pick-up in case your child needs to come home.

Children who are feverish, nauseated, or bone-tired can't learn well, and can spread their illness to others. So, keep them home. Before returning to school, your child needs to have gone without a fever or vomiting for at least 24 hours.

Talk to your child's teacher to find out the best way to make up missed work. Often, a child not quite well enough to return to class can complete assignments at home, making the workload easier to manage once he or she is back in school. Have your child make up the work as soon as possible.

Preventing the Spread of Germs

Keep your family healthy all winter long by practicing everyday disease prevention tactics.

Stress the importance of handwashing. Because germs are invisible, it's difficult for children to understand how dangerous a cough or sneeze can be. Be sure to stress

the importance of washing hands, using lots of soap and water, and scrubbing until there are bubbles—before meals and snacks, and after coughing, sneezing, or using a tissue. Many brands of liquid hand soap come in fun designs, scents, or colors, and letting children pick their own can be a fun way to encourage hand washing.



Use the "birthday song" method. Teach your child to wash his or her hands for as long as it takes to sing the entire "Happy Birthday" song.

Cough like Dracula. Children need to learn to always cover their mouths when they cough. Have your child cough into his or her sleeves, not hands, to prevent the spread of germs.

Keep hands away from eyes, nose, and mouth. Children sometimes absentmindedly put their fingers in their mouth or nose, or rub their eyes. Help

your child keep his or her hands away from "germy" areas—eyes, nose, and mouth.

Trash the tissues. Used tissues are full of germs. Teach your child to immediately put used tissues in the trash, and then wash his or her hands.

Set a healthy example. Model all these healthy behaviors—sneezing into your elbow, washing your hands frequently—and your child will follow suit.

Web Resources

Visit **Flu.gov** for the latest updates on this flu season.

For a round-up of germ prevention techniques, visit this **Centers for Disease Control** page.
www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/stopgerms.htm

This "Too Sick for School?" quiz from **Parents magazine** will help you decide whether your child should stay home.

www.parents.com/kids/too-sick-for-school/