

# Parent *pages*

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## Cough ... Sniffle ... Sniff: Keeping the Flu Bugs at Bay



God does not promise that we will be spared illness ... He gives us guidelines as a measure of His love for us. The health and strength with which He blesses us is a reminder of His grace and mercy. His love and protection are always with us.

BIRDS AND PIGS, TYPE A OR B, H1N1, FEVER, ACHEs, AND/OR VOMITING—JUST WHAT IS FLU AND HOW MIGHT YOU PREVENT IT? FLU IS A CONTAGIOUS RESPIRATORY ILLNESS CAUSED BY A VIRUS. BECAUSE IT IS A VIRUS, ANTIBIOTICS ARE INEFFECTIVE. IN FACT, ANTIBIOTICS CAN MAKE IT HARDER FOR YOUR BODY TO DEFEAT THE VIRUS BECAUSE THEY TARGET HEALTHY AS WELL AS HARMFUL BACTERIA.

The flu is usually characterized by high fevers, cough, lethargy, runny nose, sore throat, headaches, and muscle aches. It's occasionally accompanied by vomiting. A flu virus is very efficient in traveling from one person to another and is quick to replicate itself once it finds a new victim. For most people, it represents a miserable week of being sick. But for the elderly, the very young, and those with compromised immune systems, it can be very serious and even fatal.

Health departments pay close attention to the spread of flu virus for several reasons. First, we may be overdue for a pandemic (an epidemic that covers a large area of population), and second, we live in a time where travel to other countries is quick and frequent, giving viruses a free and efficient ride everywhere. Hospitals, care facilities, and schools are among the institutions that are encouraged to have a crisis plan in case of a flu epidemic. The last pandemic, in 1918, took an estimated 20 to 40 million lives, so it is easy to see why governments and health departments want to

stay on top of flu viruses.

A flu virus can get its name from the animal in which it originates. If a virus stays within a species, it would not be a problem for us. However, viruses can mutate, and once humans are able to catch a virus from an animal, the virus poses a threat. It can become an epidemic if the virus mutates to a form that can travel from human to human. We cannot "catch" a swine flu virus from eating pork, but we can be infected from being around people already infected with the virus. Also, a person sick with a virus can be infectious from one day before symptoms begin to up to five days after. This is a relatively large window of opportunity to spread the virus.

### Be offensive

To use a well-known sports phrase, the best defense against the flu virus is a good offense. Once you catch the virus, there are a few remedies that can lessen the effects. The best way to beat it is not to catch it in. Add these suggestions to your flu-fighting repertoire:

### ► VACCINATIONS:

Scientists work months ahead of flu season to predict which viruses will be most likely to spread for the coming year. They devise and prepare vaccinations to give your immune system the antibodies it needs to seek and destroy the flu virus. It is partly a guessing game, so it is not 100 percent effective, but vaccinations represent your best bet in preventing flu. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends children from ages 6 months to 18 years receive a yearly flu vaccination. Check with your child's doctor about whether a vaccination is the best course of action for your child. A vaccination takes at least two weeks to be effective, so get this done in advance of flu season.

### ► KEEP THOSE HANDS CLEAN:

If the flu virus had to depend on air alone to get from one human to the other, it wouldn't stand much of a chance. Flu viruses have their own form of public transportation; our hands provide them with a free bus ride. Hands touch things that have been sneezed or coughed on and then touch mouths, eyes, and noses. From there, it is a short hop, skip, and a jump to invade our immune system.

Scientists estimate that 80 percent of all infections are contracted through our hands. Everyone can use a review of proper hand-washing techniques—you need water, soap, friction, and ample time. Teach your children to lather up with soap and water. Then they need to scrub for enough time to physically wash the germs away. If they can scrub for the duration of one verse and a chorus of "Jesus Loves Me," they will be able to wave bye-bye to germs as they are rinsed down the sink. It is especially important to wash hands before eating. The resources found at the end of this article will lead you to materials to teach good hand-washing techniques. One new product available is a hand soap that contains a vegetable dye.

### ► KEEP THOSE HANDS DOWN:

Gently remind your child to keep his hands away from his nose, mouth, and eyes. This can be an enormous challenge but one well worth the effort.

### ► STAY HEALTHY:

Proper dieting, exercising, hydration, and sleeping are the best way to fight a virus. Don't keep healthy children from going outside in cold weather, as breathing fresh air is better than staying inside where the air is more likely to carry germs. Make sure your child is dressed appropriately for the weather.



## Stop the spread

Once a flu virus has invaded your school or community, there are ways to keep it from spreading. First, follow your local health department's guidelines regarding sick children staying home. Even if your child does not have the flu, adding a new virus or bacterial infection into the school air can greatly complicate things. Also, if your child is recovering from the flu and goes back to school too early, he or she is at risk of picking up a bacterial infection that can be even worse than the flu. No one likes to miss work or school because of illness, but if sick people stay home until they recover, there will be fewer missed days because of illness for everyone.

Second, teach your child to use a tissue when coughing or sneezing and to throw the tissue in the trash. Children are not always good about having tissues on hand, however, so it also is good to teach them to use their "arm pocket" or elbow. Do not teach them to cover their mouth with their hand as that will make it easy for the virus to get onto pencils, furniture, doorknobs, or anything else children touch.

Some seasons the current flu virus barely

gets any press. Other years the media is rife with dire warnings of what is to come. Regardless of what this year brings, we can be certain of this: our heavenly Father loves us, knows what is best for us, and will protect us.

*"But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with your favor as with a shield"* (Ps. 5:11–12).

## For Discussion:

- What communicable diseases were issues for your community as you grew up?
- What is the best way to teach children the importance of hygiene without creating an unreasonable fear of germs and illness?

## For further study:

[www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) (prevention information from the Center for Disease Control).

[www.cdc.gov/sesame.html](http://www.cdc.gov/sesame.html) (Sesame Street version of flu prevention practices for small children).

<http://tinyurl.com/6eqrus> (video on flu precautions).

[www.cdc.gov/cdctv/handstogether](http://www.cdc.gov/cdctv/handstogether) (videos on hand-washing technique and vaccinations).

<http://virus.stanford.edu/uda> (Stanford article on the 1918 flu pandemic).

[www.squidsoap.com](http://www.squidsoap.com) (Web site for vegetable dye soap).