



Department of Human Services

Incorporating: Health, Children, Community Services, Mental Health
and Housing

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Our Ref:
Your Ref:

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Dear Doctor

RE: REPORT OF A CHILD DEATH POSSIBLY ASSOCIATED WITH INFLUENZA

You will have heard about the death of a young child, possibly associated with influenza infection. This is unsubstantiated as yet, and the Coroner will determine a cause of death.

In Victoria, seasonal activity for influenza has just begun to increase, but is only now into normal seasonal activity. 260 notifications of laboratory confirmed influenza have been received in 2007 up to 8 August, compared to 245 for the same period last year.

Clinical features of influenza

Fever, headache, myalgia, lethargy, coryza, sore throat and cough. Infections in children can be associated with gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Case management

Symptomatic treatment alone is sufficient for most cases. A neuraminidase inhibitor, if commenced within the first 48 hours of the onset of illness, can decrease the severity and duration of the illness. However, if the patient is significantly unwell refer the patient to an Emergency Department for assessment and management.

Influenza vaccination

Influenza vaccine does not offer post exposure protection. Influenza vaccine is not recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) as a universal population based vaccination program for children, however it can be given to any person >6 months of age who wishes to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza.

Free vaccine is available under the National Immunisation Program for:

- All people aged 65 years and older
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and older
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 49 years with chronic medical conditions

Vaccine is also **recommended for people** (although not available free under the National Immunisation Program) in the following groups:

- Children (>6 months of age) and adults with chronic illnesses
- Residents and staff of nursing homes and other long term care facilities
- Health care workers

Two doses of vaccine at least one month apart are required for children aged < 9 years receiving influenza vaccine for the first time. Children aged **6 months to < 3 years** are recommended to receive **0.25 ml**, and those **aged 3 – 9 years to receive 0.5 ml**. Further vaccine information can be found in the NHMRC Australian Immunisation Handbook. Note that the dose schedule provided here for children comes from the new draft 9th Edition Handbook which can be found on line at www.immunise.health.gov.au.

Remember that laboratory confirmed influenza is a notifiable disease under the *Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 2001*. Doctors and laboratories are required to notify cases within 5 days to DHS. Notifications can be completed by post, by fax to 1300 651 170 or telephoned to 1300 651 160.

Enclosed is a fact sheet to distribute to parents concerned about their children. If you require any further information, please call the Communicable Disease Control Unit on 1300 651 160.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Carnie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr John Carnie
Chief Health Officer

Information for parents about children and influenza

What is Influenza?

Influenza, commonly called 'the flu', is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus.

What are the symptoms in children?

Flu in children usually causes at least two or three of the following symptoms:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Headache
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Aches and pains
- Lack of energy
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Noisy breathing (croup)

Contact a doctor if:

Your child has any of these symptoms AND

- Is under one year old
 - Was born prematurely and is now less than two years old
 - Has been in hospital within the last three months
 - Needs to see a doctor often, for example, for:
 - Chronic heart disease*
 - Cystic fibrosis or other chronic lung condition*
 - Asthma*
 - Diabetes*
 - Organ transplantation* (kidney, liver, lung, heart)
 - Cancer or leukaemia*
 - Develops a rash
 - Becomes more drowsy than usual
 - Has trouble feeding
 - Develops noisy breathing or breathing difficulties
 - Complains of pains in the chest
- You do **not** need to seek urgent assessment if the child has just a runny nose and no fever.

How long does the flu last?

Most symptoms resolve within about a week, although the cough may persist longer.

How does it spread?

Flu is very infectious. It can spread:

- through the air, by coughing, sneezing, and
- on hands, cups, cutlery, handkerchiefs, or other objects that have been in contact with the mouth and nose.

Adults and children are infectious probably just before the onset of symptoms, and for between 1 and 7 days after the symptoms appear.

What can you do for the child with flu?

- Encourage your child to drink more
- Use paracetamol for pain or discomfort
- Continue usual medications (for example, for asthma or diabetes) and follow the management plan for these conditions
- Do **not** give aspirin
- Antibiotics do **not** work against viruses, and are **not** effective against flu.

What can you do to prevent others catching flu?

- Do not send your child to child care
- Do not send your child to school
- Do not share eating or drinking utensils (for example cups, cutlery)
- Where possible, minimise close contact with healthy friends and family
- Practise good hygiene.

Flu in babies less than 12 months

Is your baby seriously ill?

Check for:

Arousal, Alertness and Activity
Your baby could be seriously ill if it is:

- More drowsy than usual, can't wake properly, doesn't respond to you normally, and is less active. The more drowsy, the more likely the illness is serious. Periods of normal activity and alertness are a good sign.

Breathing difficulty

Your baby could be seriously ill if it has:

- A heaving chest, drawing in its ribs and breast bone, or grunting with breathing.

Circulation

Your baby could be seriously ill if it:

- Suddenly becomes pale all over, or its legs feel cold up to the knees.

Feeding

Your baby could be seriously ill if it:

- Feeds less than half the normal amount over 24 hours. If your baby is breast fed, keep note over 24 hours of how often it feeds and for how long. If bottle fed, add up the volume of milk taken over 24 hours and compare it to your baby's normal intake.

Urine output

Your baby could be seriously ill if it:

- Has less than 4 wet nappies per 24 hours, in a baby under 6 months of age.

If you note any of the above contact your doctor immediately.

Further information

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation

www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas

*If your child has a chronic medical condition, it is recommended they have an annual flu vaccination—see your doctor.