

# **Pediatric Health Care**

Dr. Lori Gara-Matthews

65 Walnut Street Suite 310  
Wellesley, MA 02481  
Tel: 781-772-1527  
Fax: 781-772-1497

## **Influenza (Flu)**

Flu is an acute respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. It occurs in annual outbreaks, mainly during the winter season (in temperate climates). Signs and symptoms of upper and/or lower respiratory tract involvement are common, but the presentation varies with age and previous experience with influenza virus.

Influenza viruses are spread from person to person, primarily through contact with respiratory secretions (through sneezing, coughing, talking, touching) or contaminated objects. The incubation period is usually one to four days, resulting in rapid and high transmissibility.

### **Clinical features**

The clinical manifestations of a flu infection vary with the child's age and previous experience with the flu. The classic symptoms of uncomplicated influenza virus infection include abrupt onset of fever, headache, body aches, and discomfort, accompanied by manifestations of respiratory-tract illness, such as cough, sore throat, and runny nose. In children, you should seek help if the child:

- Feels short of breath, or has difficulty breathing
- Has blue or purplish skin color
- Has a fever with a rash
- Does not wake up easily
- Cannot stop vomiting, or cannot drink enough fluids
- Does not pee for more than 8 hours
- Does not have tears when crying (in infants)

You should call the office immediately if any of the above symptoms are seen in your child.

### **Treatment**

Patients with uncomplicated flu usually improve gradually over approximately one week, but symptoms—especially cough—may persist, particularly in young children. Weakness may last for several weeks in older children. Treatment is typically symptom based, and focused on making your child comfortable until they begin to recover. We recommend having your child rest, and making sure they are having enough fluids to compensate for any fluid lost while sick. One such way is offering small drinks of Pedialyte, or Pedialyte “popsicles” (made in an ice cube tray) to ensure they are having enough fluids.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be given every four hours for the management of headaches; muscle aches and pain (see our website for dosing.) We do not recommend aspirin for children under the age of eighteen due to the potential development for Reyes Syndrome. We do not recommend cough syrup for children under six years; for older children, cough syrup is usually not needed. Children may typically return to school after twenty four hours without a fever, without the aid of Tylenol or other medications.