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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Protecting Against the Flu:  
Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 6 Months Old**

Recent studies have shown that children less than 2 years old – even healthy children – are more likely than older children to end up in the hospital with serious complications if they get influenza (the flu). These complications can include pneumonia (an illness where the lungs get infected and inflamed), dehydration (when a child is too sick to drink enough fluids and its body loses too much water), worsening of long-term medical problems like heart disease or asthma, encephalopathy (a disease of the brain), and sinus problems and ear infections. In rare cases, complications from the flu can lead to death.

Because children are at increased risk of getting severe illness from influenza, CDC recommends that all children 6 months to 23 months old get a flu shot. However, flu vaccine is not approved for use in children less than 6 months. Also, influenza antiviral medications (special drugs used to treat and prevent the flu) are not approved for use in children younger than 6 months. Because these children cannot get a vaccine or antiviral medications but are at higher risk for serious flu-related complications, safeguarding them from influenza virus infection is especially important. This fact sheet provides advice to help protect children less than 6 months from the flu.

**Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 6 Months**

**1.) Get Vaccinated**

If you live with or care for an infant less than 6 months of age, you are in a priority group for flu vaccination for the 2004-05 flu season. Because of a shortfall in vaccine production this season, it may be hard to find vaccine, but keep trying. New supplies of vaccine are expected to be delivered through January 2005. Also, the nasal-spray flu vaccine (sold commercially as FluMist) might be an option for you. (In years without a vaccine shortage, vaccination of contacts of all children 0-23 months and children with certain medical conditions also is recommended.)

**2.) Practice Good Health Habits**

Certain good health habits can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like the flu. Protect yourself and your infant by following these steps routinely:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze—throw the tissue away after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Keep you and your baby away from people who are sick, as much as you can.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth since germs can spread this way.

(MORE)



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**(FLU TIPS – 1<sup>st</sup> AD)**

**Advice for Caregivers Who Get the Flu**

If you live with or care for an infant less than 6 months of age, follow the precautions below to help to prevent the spread of illness to your infant.

**1.) Remember How the Flu Spreads**

The main way that flu spreads is in respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled (generally up to 3 feet) through the air and infect someone nearby. Though much less frequent, the flu may also spread through indirect contact with respiratory droplets.

**2.) Follow These Steps**

If you get flu-like symptoms including a fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, or body aches, follow the precautions below:

- Check with your health-care provider. (If you have influenza, your doctor may prescribe antiviral medications for you.)
- Try to minimize contact with your infant as much as possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, and put your used tissue in a waste basket.
- Wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub frequently and as soon as possible if you have sneezed or coughed on your hands.
- Before engaging in any activity within 3 feet of your infant (including feeding, changing, rocking, reading to your child), put on a surgical mask (available in most drugstores) and thoroughly wash and dry your hands. (Information about hand hygiene can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/stopgerms.htm#GoodHealthHabits>.) Do not remove your surgical mask until you are done and you have put your infant down.
- Take these precautions for the first 7 days of your illness (beginning the first day you notice symptoms).

**3.) Be Watchful**

Observe your infant closely for symptoms of respiratory illness. If your child develops a fever (100°F or higher under the arm, 101°F orally, or 102°F rectally), respiratory symptoms, or is less responsive than normal, contact your child's doctor.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

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*The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.*