

Doctors' Voice

March-April 2016

Influenza - 'The Flu'

Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Symptoms include high fever, sore throat, weakness, headache, muscle and joint pains and a cough. Treatment includes bed rest and drinking plenty of fluids. Vulnerable people are more likely to develop serious complications including pneumonia. Immunisation can offer protection from flu.

Influenza is caused by a highly contagious virus that is spread by contact with fluids from coughs and sneezes. Every year, the flu causes widespread illness in the community. Annual immunisation is recommended for older people and other people who are at risk of serious complications from the flu, such as pneumonia. An influenza epidemic occurs when an outbreak of the illness is widespread in a certain community. A pandemic occurs when the illness is more geographically widespread and on more than one continent. Influenza epidemics occur, on average, every three years whereas pandemics have occurred only four times in the past 100 years. The flu virus has a unique ability to change its surface structure. This means that people's immune systems might not be able to effectively fight the new version of the flu that circulates each season (known as seasonal flu). This can cause widespread illness (epidemics and pandemics). For this reason, people who are at risk of complications should be immunised each year. Most cases of influenza occur within a six- to eight-week period during winter and spring.



Flu is not the common cold

The flu is more severe than a bad cold because:

- Cold symptoms last from two to a few days, whereas the flu can last up to a week.
- The flu causes a high fever, whereas a cold sometimes causes only a mild fever.
- Muscular pains and shivering attacks occur with the flu, but not with a cold.
- Colds cause a runny nose, while the flu usually starts with a dry sensation in the nose and throat.

Source: Better Health Channel

Flu vaccinations

Influenza, or flu, causes widespread illness every year. Influenza immunisation is recommended for people in known high-risk groups including people over 65, sick people in hospital, hospital staff members, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, pregnant women, residents in nursing homes or other care facilities, people with severe asthma and anyone with a chronic illness.

Serious side effects or allergic reactions to the vaccine are rare.

Speak to practice staff about having a flu vaccine.

Things to remember

- Influenza is a viral disease that causes widespread illness every year.
- Immunising people who are at risk of complications from the flu is the most important way we have to reduce the number of flu infections and deaths.
- Influenza immunisation is recommended for people in known high-risk groups.
- People who work or live with people who are at risk of serious complications should also be immunised to avoid spreading the flu.
- The vaccine **cannot give you a dose of flu** because it does not contain any live virus.

Source: Better Health Channel

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Oral Hygiene and Tooth Care

Tooth Development

Primary teeth help your child to learn to chew, speak properly and most importantly, these teeth reserve the space in your child's gums for the eruption of their permanent teeth. Primary teeth start to form in your child's jawbone before birth. A baby's first primary tooth usually erupts at about six months of age; however, this can occur as early as birth or as late as your child's first birthday. The average child has a full set of 20 primary teeth by the age of two to three years. Your child's first visit to the dentist should be within six months of the eruption of their first tooth, or by their first birthday.

Caring for your toddler's teeth

If your toddler resists teeth cleaning or struggles to sit still for two minutes, try these suggestions:

- Consider a battery-powered tooth brush, which adds novelty to cleaning their teeth
- Sing nursery rhymes or play a favourite song while you help your child brush their teeth
- Encourage your child to practise teeth cleaning (under your supervision) to instil good oral hygiene habits in them from an early age. Some toddlers like to be independent so it is a good idea for them to use one toothbrush while you use another one and take turns at brushing
- Make flossing and brushing as much fun as you can to avoid any negative association or resistance. Be sure to talk to your dentist if you need more advice

Learn to Floss

When your child is about two and a half years old, you can try introducing them to flossing their teeth. Flossing helps remove decay causing bacteria from between their teeth and keeps their gums healthy. It will take time for your child to get used to having their teeth flossed, however, ideally their teeth should be flossed twice a week in areas where the teeth are touching.

Slide the floss between your child's teeth and gently work it up and down, against the surfaces of each tooth. Do not snap the floss down between the teeth as the floss may hurt their gums. After flossing, have your child rinse with water, then brush (or if you prefer, brush then floss) your child's teeth. If you find flossing your child's teeth difficult, ask your dentist to show you how to do it. Floss holders are available, which can make flossing easier for some children.

It is important to set a good example

Children tend to imitate their parents' behaviours. If oral hygiene and looking after your teeth are important to you, they will be important to your child. Talk to your child about the importance of healthy teeth.

A child who understands that teeth have to last a lifetime is more likely to take care of them. Visit your dentist regularly to maintain your own oral health, which will in turn benefit your child

Source: Australian Dental Association Inc.

Dental advice for young adults

If you are a teenager or young adult, you need to protect your mouth and teeth by maintaining good oral health. Although regular brushing and flossing are important, the oral health of those in this age group is also often associated with risk factors such as diet, smoking and alcohol and mouth and tongue piercings.

Are silver fillings safe?

Dental amalgam ('silver fillings') have been used as a reliable, efficient, long-lasting and safe filling material for over 100 years. While you may have seen or heard commentary suggesting that the use of dental amalgam fillings is dangerous, rest assured these comments are not supported by scientific fact. Health experts and institutions world-wide support the use of amalgam fillings.



Training and Sports

Minimise injuries to the mouth and teeth by wearing a professionally fitted mouthguard when training and playing sport where there is a risk of oral injury.

Stay Well

- If you smoke, quit for good.
- If you drink alcohol, limit your intake.
- Protect your mouth and face from the sun to reduce the risk of skin cancer.
- Have regular oral health check-ups – don't wait for a problem.
- Seek advice from an oral health professional about how often you should have check-ups.

Source: Dental Health Services Victoria