



Protecting your family from the flu

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a virus that easily spreads from one person to another. It comes on suddenly and attacks the nose, throat and lungs. If you've ever had the flu, you know how bad it can make you feel. Anyone can get the flu, but children tend to catch it more often than others.

The flu season is from November to April. Most cases occur between late December and early March. The best time to get a flu shot is in October or November. This gives the body a chance to build up immunity before the winter flu season. However, you can get a flu shot

during flu season and still have some protection against the flu.

To reduce your risk of picking up the flu virus or spreading it to other people:

- Limit your exposure to people with colds or the flu.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly.
- Wash your hands frequently.

Get a the flu shot if you or your child:

- Is 6 months to 5 years old.
- Has chronic medical conditions like diabetes, asthma or heart disease.

- Is receiving long-term aspirin therapy.
- Was hospitalized during the previous year.
- Live in the same house as a grandparent or baby.
- Are in close contact with children younger than 5 years old.

Most teenagers don't need a flu shot because their bodies can handle the infection without developing other problems. However, the doctor may recommend the flu shot if you have certain medical conditions to protect you from complications from the flu, like pneumonia.

It's getting colder outside! Is your home and family safe from fire this winter?

Most home fires occur during the cold weather months, when fireplaces and space heaters are used. More than half of home fires happen at night.

The most important thing you can do to protect your family in case of fire is to install a smoke alarm. There should be at least one smoke alarm on every floor of the house and one near the bedrooms. Install them on the wall close to the ceiling because smoke rises.

Test the smoke alarms in your home once a month and replace the batteries twice a year. Replace smoke alarms after 10 years, even if they still seem to be working. If you live in an apartment, your landlord should replace the smoke alarms for you.

It's best to make an escape plan so your family knows where to go in case of a fire. Practice your escape plan at least twice a year with your family. Teach your children to crawl under the smoke and feel each door before opening it. If the door is hot, do not try to open it and get out. Use a different way out, through another door or window.

Plan a spot where your family should meet that is away from your house. Everyone should know to leave the house when the smoke alarm sounds. Do not try to go back into the house once you have left. Call 911 from a neighbor's house.

Here are tips to help keep your home from catching on fire:

- Use extension cords sparingly.
- Put no-shock childproof covers on electrical outlets.
- Do not overload outlets or surge protectors.
- Replace frayed cords.
- Run cords along walls, not under carpeting or rugs.
- Keep paper, kindling and other flammable material away from the fireplace and space heaters.
- Never use the stove to heat your home.
- Keep curtains, rugs, blankets, newspapers and magazines away from space heaters.
- Use space heaters that automatically turn off when overturned.
- Do not use space heaters near cribs.

Choosing toys for children: How to find the right toy for a child's age

The holidays are quickly approaching and parents are always looking for fun, but safe toys to buy for their children. Here are a few tips to help you and the grandparents.

Infants (younger than 1 year old)

Infants play and learn by touching and using their eyes and mouths. Some suggestions for toys are:

- Soft animals, squeaky toys, chew toys, light-up balls and rattles
- Wind-up toys and bath toys
- Soft books or cardboard books
- Toys with bright colors and smooth edges
- Toys should be easy to clean or wash.
- Avoid toys with strings that can wrap around a baby's neck.

Toddlers (1 to 2 years old)

Toddlers are beginning to put things together. Look for toys that you and your toddler can play with:

- Solid wood blocks of different sizes
- Push and pull toys
- Lightweight balls at least 3 inches across
- Pounding toys and blocks

- Picture books
- Toys for a toddler should not have parts that could break off and become a choking hazard.
- Toys with sharp points or edges, marbles, toys with strings, cords or ribbons can be deadly to a toddler.
- Do not buy battery-operated toys yet. Small, round batteries can choke a child. Batteries are also poisonous.
- A good rule of thumb is that if the object can fit inside a toilet paper tube, then a child can choke on it.

Preschoolers (3 to 4 years old)

Preschoolers are learning fine motor skills and are beginning to be creative in their play and stories. These toys will help them develop:

- Riding toys
- Hand puppets
- Counting toys
- Art supplies
- Board games
- Lightweight soft baseball and bat
- Dolls

School-aged children (6 to 10 years old)

School-aged children like toys they can play with their friends and that challenge their imaginations and hand- coordination:

- Action figures
- Board games
- Sports equipment and protective gear
- Handheld electronic games
- Bikes, scooters and skateboards. Don't forget the bike helmet!

Keep playtime safe and fun

Whatever age of the child, be alert to keep play safe. Follow these tips to keep your child safe while playing with toys:

- Always watch children while they are playing.
- Be sure that children use toys in a safe environment.
- Make sure children wear the right protective equipment when riding bikes, scooters or skateboards.
- Teach children to put toys away after playing. This helps keep older children's toys out of the hands of younger children.

Get in the holiday spirit by volunteering to help those less fortunate

Many community organizations and churches need extra volunteers during the holiday months. Help your children learn how rewarding volunteering can be this holiday season by volunteering as a family. Best of all, volunteering costs nothing but a little of your time and energy!

Volunteering teaches children:

- That giving your time, effort and kindness is rewarding.
- That one person can make a difference. This is a powerful message for a child that he or she is important enough to have an impact on someone's life.
- Tolerance by bringing children and teens in touch with people of different backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, ages, income and education levels.
- Appreciation for what they have by helping others who aren't as fortunate.

Places to volunteer with your children:

- Schools
- Nursing homes
- Food pantries
- Children's hospitals
- Animal shelters
- Habitat for Humanity
- Churches
- Homeless shelters



For more information on these and other health and safety topics, visit us at www.TexasChildrensHealthPlan.org or call 1-800-990-8247.