

## **THE FLU (INFLUENZA)**

(A viral infection of the respiratory tract)

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus. Influenza is typically more severe than the common cold. Most people with the flu are sick for about a week. However, the flu can cause serious illness such as pneumonia for some people such as young children, pregnant women, older people and those with long term health problems such as diabetes, asthma or heart disease. Flu season starts in the fall and peaks in January or February.

**Incubation period:** (the time between exposure to the disease and the appearance of symptoms) from 1 to 4 days – (2 days on average)

**Contagious period:** (when the disease can be transmitted to another person) Children may be infectious for 7 to 10 days, adults are generally infectious 1 day before and 5 days after symptoms appear.

**Signs and symptoms:**

The virus causes fever with cough (usually dry), headache, tiredness, weakness or exhaustion, muscle and or body aches. A sore throat with a runny or stuffy nose may also be present.

**Treatment:**

Antibiotics will not help since this is a virus. Some antiviral drugs are available that can reduce the severity of symptoms, but they would need to be given within 48 hours of symptom onset. These medicines need to be approved by a doctor. It is important to get plenty of rest and drink increased amounts of clear fluids. **Never give aspirin or medicine that has aspirin in it** to children or teenagers who may have the flu.

**How this disease is spread:**

The virus is spread person to person by sneezing or coughing the virus into the air or onto surfaces. Breathing in these droplets or touching contaminated surfaces, then touching your mouth or nose will expose you to the flu.

**Control of cases:**

Children should be excluded from school when feeling ill and if unable to tolerate general school activities. This will help avoid giving the flu to other children. They should also be feeling well and fever free (without meds) for 24 hours before returning.

**General prevention measures:**

Getting the yearly flu vaccine (or nasal spray flu vaccine) is the best way to protect oneself against flu. Teach the importance of proper hand washing and covering your cough. Maintain good health habits, i.e., good nutrition, exercise and plenty of rest as

well as limiting the touching of eyes, nose or mouth. Discourage children from sharing eating & drinking utensils.