

Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze.

A Lesson on Preventing the Flu

Playgroup #5

Materials Needed

- Soap and water
- Towels or paper towels
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer

Handouts

- The 6 Steps of Handwashing
- Cover your Cough
- An Ounce of Prevention

Introduction

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a contagious illness of the respiratory system. It is caused by a virus, meaning antibiotics are not effective against the flu. Common flu symptoms include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms (i.e. nausea, vomiting, diarrhea) may occur but are more common in children.

Certain people, such as children, are at an increased risk for flu complications, which can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of other chronic health conditions, such as asthma.

In the U.S., flu season can begin as early as October and last until May. Every year in the United States an average of 5-20% of the population gets the flu, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized for flu complications, and about 36,000 people die from the flu.

Influenza is mainly spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing of infected persons. You can also catch the flu by touching an object, such as a doorknob, that has been contaminated with the flu virus and then touching your mouth or nose. A person with the flu is contagious *1 day before* symptoms develop and *5 days after* becoming sick.

As a group, have the mothers discuss ways in which they can help prevent their family members from catching the flu.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the steps to take to prevent the flu
- Understand the importance of washing your hands in flu prevention
- Know how to appropriately wash your hands
- Understand the difference between using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer

Preventing the Flu

In order to prevent the flu, it is important to take certain precautions. According to the CDC (Protecting against influenza, 2006), you and your child should (1) get vaccinated against the flu and (2) practice good health habits, such as covering your cough and washing your hands.

1. Get Vaccinated

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all children between 6 months and 5 years get a yearly flu shot. Close contacts, such as family members and caregivers, of children under the age of 2 years should also get vaccinated against the flu each year. Since children under 6 months of age are not able to get a flu shot or receive antiviral drugs to treat the flu, close contacts should make sure to be vaccinated in order to prevent the child from catching the flu.

It is best to get vaccinated against the flu in October or November, but it is still available throughout the flu season. There are two types of vaccines available:

- The flu shot – This is an inactivated vaccine, meaning it contains killed flu viruses, that is given using a needle. The shot is approved for all people over the age of 6 months.
- The nasal-spray vaccine – This vaccine is made with live, weakened flu viruses. It is approved for all healthy people between the ages of 5 and 49 years that are not pregnant.

2. Practice Good Health Habits

Follow these steps routinely to help decrease the risk of you or your child catching or spreading the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when your cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away after use.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often, especially after your cough or sneeze. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if you are not near water.
- Avoid people who are coughing and sneezing as much as you can.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with your hands since germs spread this way.

For children, remind them to:

- Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away after they use it.
- Wash their hands often with either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after they cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

If you catch the flu, follow these steps to prevent your child from becoming sick:

- Check with your health-care provider. You may be prescribed antiviral medication.
- Do not go to work if you work in a daycare setting.
- Try to minimize contact with your child as much as possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and properly dispose of the tissue after use.
- Wash your hands as soon as possible after you sneeze or cough on them. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Take these precautions for the first 5 days of your illness, starting the first day symptoms appear.

Contact your child's doctor if:

- They develop respiratory symptoms.
- They develop a fever - 100°F or higher under the arm, 101°F orally, or 102°F rectally.
- They are less responsive than normal.

When washing your hands, you should practice the following CDC (Clean hands, 2006) recommendations.

When using soap and water:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if it is available.
- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands for 20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing "Happy Birthday" twice through to a friend!
- Rinse hands well under running water
- Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use your paper towel to turn off the faucet

When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply product to the palm of one hand
- Rub hands together
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.
- Remember, only use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if your hands are not visibly soiled.

When should you wash your hands?

- Before preparing or eating foods
- After going to the bathroom
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child that has gone to the bathroom
- Before and after taking care of someone who is sick
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After handling an animal or animal waste
- After handling garbage
- Before and after treating a cut or wound

Activity

Demonstrate the correct way to wash hands according to the CDC guidelines. Give each parent a copy of “The 6 Steps of Hand Washing.” Parents will then practice washing their hands correctly and will teach their children how to wash their hands while singing “Happy Birthday” twice through.

Suggested Reading

Body Buddies Say... "Wash Your Hands!"

by Leeann Wenkman & Shawn Pettersen

References

CDC (2006). Clean hands save lives! Retrieved on September 26, 2007, from <http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands/>

CDC (2006). Protecting against influenza (flu): Advice for caregivers of children less than 2 years old. Retrieved on September 26, 2007, from <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/infantcare.htm>