

# BEAT THE BUGS THIS WINTER

The illnesses to prepare for  
and how to prevent them

## TOPIC #5 Influenza

Disease Snapshot

What to do if someone  
has influenza symptoms

General Q&As

For your ELS or school  
community

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## Influenza Disease Snapshot

### What is it?

Influenza, or the flu, is a virus that is very easy to catch through touch and through the air via coughing, sneezing, talking and singing. Some people get very sick and the virus causes around 500 deaths every year.

The influenza virus infects your nose, throat and lungs and is normally much worse than a 'cold'. You can easily catch the flu even if you are fit and healthy.

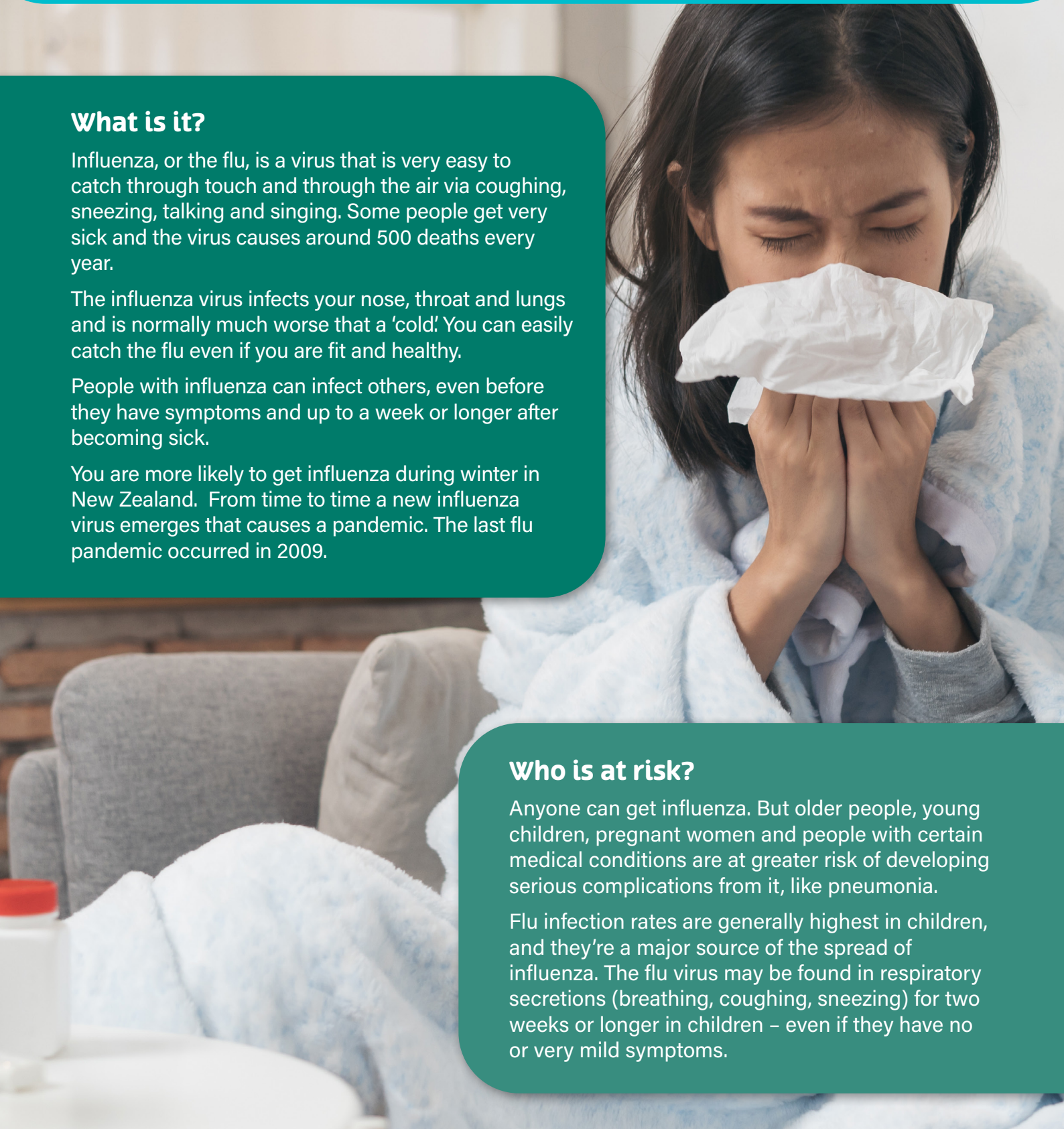
People with influenza can infect others, even before they have symptoms and up to a week or longer after becoming sick.

You are more likely to get influenza during winter in New Zealand. From time to time a new influenza virus emerges that causes a pandemic. The last flu pandemic occurred in 2009.

### Who is at risk?

Anyone can get influenza. But older people, young children, pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions are at greater risk of developing serious complications from it, like pneumonia.

Flu infection rates are generally highest in children, and they're a major source of the spread of influenza. The flu virus may be found in respiratory secretions (breathing, coughing, sneezing) for two weeks or longer in children – even if they have no or very mild symptoms.



## Signs and symptoms

It can take 1-4 days to feel symptoms after you catch influenza. Common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Aches
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Upset stomach

The worst symptoms usually last about five days, but coughing can last up to 2-3 weeks. Seek urgent medical attention if the symptoms are severe, for example difficulty breathing or chest pain, seizures or convulsions, a high fever that doesn't come down (especially if you're pregnant), purple or bluish discolouration to the lips, skin, fingers or toes.

Seek medical help for babies and young children who:

- Are breathing fast or noisily, or if they are grunting or wheezing
- Are very pale
- Are drowsy or difficult to wake
- Are severely irritable, not wanting to be held
- Are limp, unable to move
- Have dry nappies or no tears when crying (this means they are dehydrated)
- Are showing signs of other serious conditions like meningococcal disease (which may include severe headache, stiff neck, dislike of bright lights, and sometimes a rash, but in very young children are often non-specific such as sleepiness and vomiting).

## How to prevent it

Immunisation is your best protection against the flu and helps reduce the risk of getting really sick or having to go to hospital.

The strains of virus that cause influenza constantly change, so having had the flu before does not stop you getting it again. The best way to protect against getting the flu is to have an annual flu vaccination. Each year, the formulation of the flu vaccine is reviewed and updated to keep up with changing flu viruses.

About four out of five people with flu have no symptoms and don't know they can be spreading the virus to others. Being vaccinated reduces the risk of accidentally passing the virus to whānau, friends and your community.

In 2022 the vaccination is free for:

- Children aged between 3 and 12 years
- People aged 65+
- Māori and Pasifika aged 55+
- People with long-term medical conditions like diabetes or asthma
- Children aged 4 years or under who have been in hospital with a respiratory condition, like asthma.



## Reducing the risk of influenza

To protect your ELS and school communities, encourage staff, parents, caregivers and whānau to get the influenza vaccination. It's available from most GPs and pharmacies.

As with other viruses, it's also important to keep up good hygiene practices:

- Stay home if you're sick and remind staff, families and whānau to do the same.
- Stay away from others who are sick
- Wear a mask
- Physically distance wherever you can
- Use disposable tissues
- Cover coughs and sneezes and wash your hands after blowing your nose or a child's.
- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces, especially high-touch surfaces like door handles, table and bench tops, toys and light switches.
- Don't share drinks or utensils such as cutlery.
- Keep indoor spaces well ventilated, e.g. open windows.

## What to do if you get symptoms

Staff and children who are sick with influenza should not attend work, education or any other activity until they are fully recovered and no longer infectious to others.

## What treatment is there for influenza?

- Stay at home and rest, ideally in a separate, well-ventilated room away from others.
- Stay hydrated by drinking small amounts of fluid often. Water is best. Avoid tea, coffee and alcohol as these dry you out even more.

You can also:

- Reduce fever by using a damp cloth on your forehead, washing the arms and body with a cool cloth, bathing in slightly warm water.
- Take appropriate medicines to relieve discomfort and fever if necessary. It is especially important to reduce fever if you are pregnant. (*Children or young people should not be given aspirin.*)
- Gargle a glass of warm water and/or suck sugarless hard sweets or lozenges to help with sore throats.
- Shower or bathe regularly and keep bedding and nightwear clean and dry.
- Use skin balm or moisturiser to stop your lips from cracking.

Seek urgent medical help if you or someone you are caring for has any of the more severe symptoms listed under 'Signs and symptoms.'



## Where to find more information

### Healthline: 0800 611 116

a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available

### Auckland Regional Public Health Service

[www.arphs.health.nz/public-health-topics/disease-and-illness/influenza-the-flu](http://www.arphs.health.nz/public-health-topics/disease-and-illness/influenza-the-flu)

### Health Navigator

[www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/i/influenza](http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/i/influenza)

### The Immunisation Advisory Centre

[www.immune.org.nz/diseases/influenza](http://www.immune.org.nz/diseases/influenza)

### The Ministry of Health

[www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/influenza](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/influenza)

### KidsHealth (A Starship Foundation and Paediatric Society of New Zealand website)

[www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza)

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## Influenza

What to do if someone has influenza symptoms

If the person has symptoms such as a cough, runny nose and fever:

Send the person home with a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) and ask them to do the test at home to rule out COVID-19.

### IF POSITIVE

The person and their household will need to follow the standard guidelines and public health advice for COVID-19.

### IF NEGATIVE, but they are still sick with the **same** symptoms

They should do another RAT 48 hours later. They can return to your school/ELS 24 hours after their symptoms end IF:

- They have no new symptoms
- They are feeling well, and
- Their RATs have been negative.

### IF NEGATIVE, but their symptoms persist or they develop new or worsening symptoms

They should go/continue to stay at home.

They should immediately call Healthline (0800 611 116) or their family doctor/health provider for advice on what to do next.

**Important:** Please note that influenza is **not** a notifiable disease and therefore does not need to be reported to Auckland Regional Public Health Service.



### More information

**Healthline:** 0800 611 116  
a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available

**KidsHealth**  
[www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza)

**Auckland Regional Public Health Service**  
[www.arphs.health.nz/public-health-topics/disease-and-illness/influenza-the-flu](http://www.arphs.health.nz/public-health-topics/disease-and-illness/influenza-the-flu)

**The Immunisation Advisory Centre**  
[www.immune.org.nz/diseases/influenza](http://www.immune.org.nz/diseases/influenza)

**Ministry of Health**  
[www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/influenza](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/influenza)

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## Influenza Q&As

### Will everyone have to stay home if we have an influenza case at our ELS or school?

No. Only people who have symptoms should stay at home, until 24 hours after their symptoms have ended and they are feeling well.

### What should you do to prepare for influenza at your ELS or school?

The most important thing to do is to get vaccinated against influenza each year and encourage others to do the same.

Other steps you can take include making sure that people know to stay home if they are unwell, and to keep up robust hygiene and cleaning measures. Keeping spaces well ventilated, e.g. opening windows, is also important.

### How effective is the influenza vaccine?

Sometimes getting a vaccine will not stop you getting flu, but it should stop you getting really sick.

It takes up to 2 weeks after getting your jab for your body to start protecting against flu.

For the best protection, you'll need to get the flu vaccine every year because:

- protection against flu reduces over time
- each year flu can be caused by different strains of flu viruses that aren't covered by the previous year's vaccine.

When the flu strains in the vaccine are a good match to the flu strains circulating in the community:

- around half to two-thirds of healthy vaccinated adults aged under 65 years of age will be protected against flu infection
- almost two-thirds of vaccinated adults who get flu will be protected from needing hospital care
- up to two-thirds of children who receive the vaccine will be protected from getting sick with flu
- about half to two-thirds of the immunised children aged 6 months – 17 years will be protected from needing hospital care for flu.

### Children often have coughs and colds all through winter. How do we know when it's OK for them to be back at our ELS or school?

Most healthy young tamariki have at least eight viral infections, like coughs or colds, each year and these are a normal part of childhood. Generally speaking:

- If their symptoms have just started e.g. a cough, runny nose, fever, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhoea or a rash, they should be kept at home until they're feeling better.
- If a child has COVID-19 symptoms, they should take a RAT. If they return a positive result, they and their household will need to stay home in isolation for at least 7 days.
- If a child has an ongoing fever, is getting worse or won't eat and drink, then medical advice should be sought – even if they have already been assessed by a health professional.
- If the illness wasn't COVID-19 and the child has felt well for the past 24 hours and is eating and drinking normally, they can return to school or preschool.
- If they still have a slight dry cough or runny nose after having an illness, but they're otherwise feeling well, they're unlikely to be contagious and can be with others again.

### Can you be vaccinated against influenza and COVID-19 at the same time?

Yes, there's no need to leave a gap between getting you influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations.

### How does the flu vaccination work?

The 2022 flu vaccine contains harmless parts of four strains of flu viruses, not the whole virus. When you are given the flu jab, your immune system reacts to the parts, makes cells, and a special type of proteins called antibodies that will protect you against the flu.

The flu jab can only protect you against these four strains of flu, it cannot protect you against COVID-19, the common cold, or other viruses and diseases in circulation.

The flu vaccine:

- does not contain any live viruses
- does not contain any preservatives, thiomersal, or mercury
- contains only very tiny amounts of egg protein and is safe for people with egg allergies
- cannot give you flu.



### If we've had an influenza case at our ELS or school, do we have to do any special cleaning?

Influenza spreads very easily by coughing or sneezing, or by touching a surface with infected saliva or mucus. The virus can survive outside the body on hard surfaces for up to a week, although will usually die within 24 hours.

As is standard practice in preventing the spread of infectious diseases, it's important that you thoroughly clean frequently used surfaces such as tables, bench tops, door handles, light switches, toys and taps.

Advice on cleaning and the appropriate products to use is available: [www.midcentraldhb.govt.nz/HealthServices/PublicHealth/healthprotection/Documents/MidCentral%20Public%20Health%20Service%20ECE%20Cleaning%20Guidelines.pdf](http://www.midcentraldhb.govt.nz/HealthServices/PublicHealth/healthprotection/Documents/MidCentral%20Public%20Health%20Service%20ECE%20Cleaning%20Guidelines.pdf)

### Do masks prevent the spread of influenza?

Like many respiratory illnesses, influenza spreads by coughing and sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the virus.

**Immunisation offers the best protection against the illness.** Wearing a properly fitted mask can also help reduce the risk of spread, along with practising good hygiene such as:

- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Putting used tissues in the bin
- Coughing or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands, if you don't have a tissue.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose.
- Using an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available.





### How is influenza different from COVID-19 or the common cold? How can you tell the difference?

Having the flu is usually much worse than having a common cold and can be very serious. Colds, influenza and COVID-19 all affect your airways and how you breathe. This means the illnesses can be easily confused with one another. If you have symptoms, get a COVID-19 test and if you think you are (or might be) positive, get someone else to pick up medication and supplies for you rather than going into shops or pharmacies yourself

The following table sets out the differences between a cold and influenza:

	A cold	Influenza (the flu)
Description	Mild illness lasting 1–2 weeks. Some symptoms, such as a cough, may continue for a few weeks.	Moderate to severe illness with sudden onset of symptoms lasting 7–10 days. The cough and tiredness can last for weeks after the rest of the illness is over.
Symptoms	Early signs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a sore throat</li><li>• sneezing</li><li>• running nose</li><li>• mild fever.</li><li>• Muscle pain is uncommon.</li><li>• Mild headache (congested sinuses).</li><li>• Sometimes a cough.</li></ul> After a few days, snot usually becomes thicker and may turn a greenish or yellowish colour.	Sudden onset of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• fever (temperature of 38°C or higher)</li><li>• shivering</li><li>• muscle aches</li><li>• debilitating tiredness</li><li>• headache (may be severe).</li></ul> Dry cough may become moist. Bed rest is necessary.
Prevention	Washing your hands frequently. Not coughing over other people.	Influenza (flu) vaccine (free for those in high-risk groups). Washing your hands frequently. Not coughing over other people.
Possible complications	Sinus congestion Ear infection	Bronchitis Pneumonia – can be life-threatening

Table sourced from: KidsHealth ([www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza))

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**Influenza**  
For your ELS or School Community

## Information to share with your ELS or school community

Below is sample copy that you can include in communications with your school, kura, ELS, kohanga or language nest community (for example, via newsletters, email, social media or your website).

You may also wish to use extracts from elsewhere in this resource to inform your communications.

### Beat the bugs: Influenza – it's here and it's not just 'a cold'

High rates of influenza have been seen in the community this winter so now is a good time to get vaccinated against the virus if you haven't already!

The vaccine is free for many including, for the first time this year, children aged 3-12 years.

Flu infection rates are generally highest in children, who are also a major source of the spread of influenza.

Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) says there had been very little influenza in New Zealand over the past two-and-a-half years due to COVID-19 restrictions.

"That means our community immunity is lower than usual and we are more susceptible to the strains of influenza virus coming into the country now our borders are opening up," says ARPHS' Medical Officer of Health. "As a result, we're already seeing higher than normal rates of influenza."

Influenza, or the flu, isn't just a 'bad cold'. It can cause serious illness, including secondary complications like pneumonia, and be life-threatening with around 500 people dying every year.

The virus is very easy to catch through touch and through the air via coughing, sneezing, talking and singing. It infects your nose, throat and lungs and you can easily catch it - even if you're fit and healthy.

Vaccination offers the best protection against the virus, and keeping up good hygiene habits helps too; cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or your upper sleeve or elbow, wash and dry your hands often and thoroughly (especially after blowing your nose or your child's nose), wear a mask, stay home if you are sick and frequently clean surfaces (especially high-touch surfaces like tables, benchtops, door handles and light switches).

To find out if you are eligible for a free influenza vaccination, and where to get it (most GPs and pharmacies), visit: [nrhcc.health.nz/winter-wellness/flu-vaccine-locations](https://nrhcc.health.nz/winter-wellness/flu-vaccine-locations)

## Did you know?

- People with influenza can infect others, even before they have symptoms and up to a week or longer after becoming sick.
- You can get an influenza vaccination and a COVID-19 vaccination at the same time.
- The influenza vaccine cannot give you the flu and does not contain any live viruses.
- Sometimes getting a vaccine will not stop you getting flu, but it should stop you getting really sick.
- It takes up to 2 weeks after getting your jab for your body to start protecting against flu. So the sooner you get it, the sooner you'll be protected!
- For the best protection you need to get the flu vaccine every year. This is because protection against flu reduces over time and because flu can be caused by different strains of flu viruses that aren't covered by the previous year's vaccine.

## For more information

[www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza](http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza)