

## Nurses Notes

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### It is Not Too Late to Get the Flu Vaccine

Beaver Dam has suffered enough tragedies so far this year. I am writing to parents to consider vaccinating your child against the flu this year, if you have not already done so. Log on to [www.familiesfightingflu.org](http://www.familiesfightingflu.org) for some compelling stories of families who lost their children from a seemingly harmless illness. Noel Smith is a 15 month old child from Beaver Dam who died in 2008 from influenza/flu. Her story is one of those highlighted on the website.

#### What is the Flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. While most healthy people recover from the flu without complications, some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious complications from the flu.

#### Know the Risk from the Flu

Some of the complications caused by the flu include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children and adults may develop sinus problems and ear infections.

#### Be Aware of Common Flu Symptoms

The flu usually starts suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Diarrhea and vomiting also can occur but are more common in children

These symptoms are referred to as "flu-like symptoms." A lot of different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms. Although the term "stomach flu" is sometimes used to describe vomiting, nausea, or diarrhea, these illnesses are caused by certain other viruses, bacteria, or possibly parasites, and are rarely related to influenza.

Because colds and flu share many symptoms, it can be difficult (or even impossible) to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Special tests that usually must be done within the first few days of illness can be carried out, when needed to tell if a person has the flu.

#### Look Out for Emergency Warning Signs

There are some "emergency warning signs" that require urgent medical attention.

**In children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

**In adults and older children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

**Seek medical care immediately** (call your doctor or go to an emergency room) if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs above. When you arrive, tell the reception staff that you think you have the flu. You may be asked to wear a mask and/or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick.

**Prevent the Flu**

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each fall. It is still not too late to get vaccinated!!

The BDUSD website has more information on the flu under Health Services.