Flu arrives early: What you need to know about flu season 2012-2013

The bad news: Influenza has hit the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control, eight states (Alabama, Alaska, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) have reported widespread influenza activity. Unfortunately, experts predict a bad season; flu has already killed five children so far this season.

The good news is that 90 % of the identified flu strains are covered by this year's flu vaccine.

The great news is that you can help prevent your child and yourself from getting influenza by getting the flu vaccine. Anyone who takes care of your child should receive this year's flu vaccine as well. Vaccines are more effective when everyone gets them.

If your child is younger than nine years old and received one or no doses of flu vaccine since July 2010 (when the H1N1 outbreak occurred), he will need two doses of this year's flu vaccine separated by at least one month to be optimally immunized against the flu. Keep in mind as well that it takes about two weeks for the vaccine to be maximally effective after it is given. So vaccinate now!

For more information about the flu and the flu vaccine, please see our prior posts about how vaccines work, how to distinguish flu symptoms from common cold symptoms, and facts vs myths about the flu and the flu vaccine.

Remember also to **wash your hands**. And cover your cough.

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