Influenza/Influenza-Like Illness
“The Flu”

What is it?
Influenza is a common respiratory infection during the winter season. Like the common cold, influenza is caused by viruses that spread quickly from person to person. Typical symptoms resemble a severe cold and include abrupt onset of fever, chills, dry cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, and nasal congestion. Vomiting is also sometimes present in children. Some people develop all these symptoms, some develop only a few. Fever tends to last four to six days, while the cough and nasal congestion last 10 to 14 days. Flu is very contagious; if one person in the home gets the flu, other family members are likely to catch it as well. Most people with the flu lose their appetite for several days.

There are many viruses other than flu that cause similar symptoms in the winter. We do not use specialized tests to determine if your child has influenza or one of these other viruses since in most cases they are all treated the same. We refer to illness caused by flu or these other viruses as “flu-like illness”.

How is it treated?
Antibiotics are of no value against viral infections such as colds or flu. Your immune system is the primary means by which the infection is defeated. The infection will run its course for several days and then go away naturally. Until it does go away by itself, there are several recommendations for feeling better:

• Tylenol or Motrin for fever/headache/muscle pain. This will not make the fever go away any faster, but it will lower the fever somewhat and make your child more comfortable.
• Drink plenty of liquids, and get extra bed rest
• Cough and cold medicines are not helpful for children under 5 years of age, so we don’t recommend them. For children under two years of age, cough and cold medicines may even cause dangerous side effects, so we advise against their use in these young children.
• For children over 5 years of age, over-the-counter cough and cold medicines may be helpful: Dimetapp or Triaminic can help the stuffy nose and Robitussin DM given at bedtime may help the cough. None of these medicines make the flu go away any faster, but they may make your child feel better until the infection goes away by itself.
• Antiviral medications such as Tamiflu generally are not recommended for children with flu since they must be started in the first 48 hours of the illness to be of any benefit and even then are only mildly helpful.
What to watch for:
Flu goes away by itself after a few days, and most people have no further problems. Some people do develop new, second problems late in the course of the illness such as ear infection, sinus infection or pneumonia. These are some symptoms to watch for:

- Fever lasting more than five days
- Difficulty breathing/rapid breathing
- Chest or ear pain
- Not able to drink liquids
- Little or no urine output in eight to 12 hours
- Runny nose not getting better after 10 days

Please see your doctor if your child has any of these symptoms.