



Influenza

for The General Public

What is influenza?

- Influenza is an infection caused by influenza viruses.
- There are several different types of influenza viruses.

How does a person get influenza?

- The virus is spread:
 - directly from person to person through coughing and sneezing
 - indirectly from touching contaminated surfaces and objects, and then touching the eyes/nose/mouth.
- The virus can survive on some surfaces for up to 48 hours.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Symptoms develop 1 to 4 days after a person has become infected.
- Influenza has a sudden onset with fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness and cough.

- Fever may not be prominent in the children or the elderly.
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are not common in adults but may occur in children.
- Influenza is more severe than the common cold (see table below).
- In severe cases, influenza may result in pneumonia, bronchitis, kidney or heart failure.
- Most symptoms resolve in 5 to 7 days.

What is Pandemic Influenza and why is it so severe?

- Pandemic Influenza is a worldwide outbreak of Influenza.
- It is caused by a new type of virus which occurs every 10 to 30 years. Because the virus is completely new, the body has no immunity to it. This means that more people will develop the illness than in non-pandemic years.

Common Cold versus Influenza

Symptoms	Common Cold	Influenza
Fever	Rare (mild)	Common 39 - 40°C (sudden onset)
Aches and Pains	Occasional (mild)	Common (often severe)
Fatigue/weakness	Occasional (mild)	Common (severe)
Headache	Rare except with sinus congestion	Common (can be severe)
Sore Throat	Common	Occasional (mild)
Cough	Common (mild to moderate)	Common (can be severe)
Nasal Discharge	Common	Occasional
Chest Discomfort	Occasional (mild to moderate)	Common (can become severe)
Symptoms Last	5 – 10 days	Up to 2 weeks

How is influenza treated?

- Get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Advil) helps to lessen fever, aches and pains. A.S.A. (Aspirin) should not be given to children younger than 17 years of age due to possibility of developing Reye's Syndrome (a very serious neurological disease).
- Gargle with a glass of warm water containing ½ teaspoon of salt to ease a sore throat. Lozenges and sugarless hard candy are also effective.
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol – smoking irritates the airways and alcohol dries the tissues which makes them more susceptible to other infections.
- Prescription medication(s) may be prescribed by your doctor.

How is influenza prevented?

- Influenza immunization is the best method of prevention.
- Avoid crowded places.
- Cough or sneeze into your arm or sleeve instead of your hands..
- Wash hands frequently with soap & water.
- Use hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol when soap & water are not available.
- People with influenza symptoms, should stay home to avoid passing it on to others.
- Prescription medications may be prescribed by your doctor.

When should I call my doctor?

- Call your doctor if any of the following symptoms develop:
 - shortness of breath while resting
 - difficult or painful breathing
 - coughing up bloody sputum
 - wheezing
 - a fever greater than 39° C that lasts more than 4 days or if it is getting worse
 - you start to feel better and suddenly get a fever over 39° C and start to feel sick again
 - drowsiness, disorientation or confusion
 - extreme pain in your ear.
- For children, call the doctor if the child:
 - has a heart or lung disease or any chronic illness which requires regular medical care
 - has a disease or is taking drugs or treatments that affect the immune system
 - has trouble breathing
 - is less than 6 months old and has a temperature over 38.5°C
 - is irritable and cannot be calmed down
 - is listless and doesn't play with toys
 - drinks little fluid and does not urinate at least every 6 hours when awake
 - has severe vomiting or diarrhea.
- For children, call 911 if the child:
 - has severe trouble breathing
 - has blue lips
 - is limp or unable to move
 - has a stiff neck
 - seems confused
 - has a seizure.

**For more information contact the
Provincial Health Information Line at 1-877-800-0002
Or Public Health Services at 655-4612**