

What is influenza?

- A contagious viral disease of the respiratory system caused by the influenza virus. Influenza A & Influenza B are the two main strains.

What is the incubation period of influenza?

- 1 to 3 days.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Sudden onset of fever, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, sore throat, tiredness and cough.
- Fever may not be prominent in 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, but cough and fatigue can last 2 weeks or more.

What is Pandemic influenza?

- Pandemic Influenza occurs when a major genetic shift occurs in the Influenza A virus. This creates a new virus to which the population has little or no immunity. This happens about every 10 to 30 years (i.e. H1N1 in 2009).
- The virus is transmitted easily from person to person.
- The virus may be more virulent and cause serious illness and death.

How do you prevent influenza?

- Annual influenza immunization is the best method of prevention.
- Frequent hand hygiene. Hand washing with soap and water is preferred; if unavailable, then use an alcohol based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid crowded places.
- Cover nose and throat when coughing or sneezing. Promptly dispose of used tissues.

- Frequent cleaning of surfaces that could be contaminated with upper respiratory secretions.

What are my work restrictions if I have influenza?

- Do not attend work for 5 days after onset, unless otherwise directed by MHO or OH&S.
- Stay at home to avoid passing influenza to others.

How effective is immunization?

- The effectiveness of the vaccine depends primarily on the age and immunocompetence of the vaccine recipient as well as the degree of similarity between the virus strains in the vaccine and those strains circulating in the community.
- When the antigenic match between the vaccine and circulating virus is close, the vaccine offers a greater degree of protection. Protection decreases as people get older.

Why is influenza vaccine important for health care providers?

- Health care workers are provided with the vaccine to keep them well so that they can take care of the ill.

What are the side effects of influenza vaccine?

- Most people have no side effects from the annual Influenza vaccine. However, some people may develop side effects.
- Most are mild and resolve within 3 days. Common side effects include:
 - soreness, redness or swelling at injection site
 - limited movement of the immunized limb
 - headache, weakness
- An unimmunized worker, even when feeling well, can carry the virus and spread to others, including those most at risk of severe disease (ie: patients, infants, elderly).

- loss of appetite
- muscle aches/joint aches
- chills or fever, fatigue
- nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

How can you tell the difference between a cold and influenza?

- The table below illustrates the differences.

Common Cold versus Influenza		
Symptom	Common Cold	Influenza
Incubation period	2 to 5 days	1 to 3 days
Fever	Rare	Usual, high fever (102°F/39°C to 104°F/40°C) sudden onset, lasts 3-4 days
Aches and Pains	Sometimes, mild	Usual, often severe
Extreme Fatigue	Unusual	Usual, early onset
Tired and weak	Sometimes, mild	Usual, may last 2-3 weeks or more
Headache	Rare	Usual, can be severe
Sore Throat	Common	Common
Cough	Common (mild to moderate)	Very Common (can be severe)
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Common
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort	Sometimes (mild to moderate)	Usual (can become severe)
Complications	Can lead to sinus congestion or earache	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure; can worsen a current chronic respiratory condition; can be life threatening
Symptoms Last	5 to 10 days	Up to 2 weeks

Immunize Canada <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/publications/diseases-conditions/is-it-cold-or-flu/pub-eng.pdf>

For more information call:

- Provincial Health Information Line at **811** or
 - Population and Public Health at **306-655-4612**
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