



Influenza Information for Residents of Long Term Care Homes

Fluzone High-Dose, is being offered to residents 65 years of age and older who are living in Long Term Care Homes in Saskatchewan. It protects against three of the influenza strains and is expected to provide better protection against seasonal influenza “flu”. Recent studies suggest that Fluzone High-Dose is significantly more effective than standard-dose vaccine in preventing influenza-like illness, hospitalization, serious cardiorespiratory events possibly related to influenza and death (CCDR June 2018).

Influenza

Is an infection caused by the influenza A or B virus and may cause severe disease resulting in hospitalization and in some cases even death. Seniors, those with chronic health conditions and children under the age of 5 are more at risk for complications such as pneumonia. Living in a long term care home can increase the risk of influenza infection as it is easily spread.

Influenza virus can be spread when a person talks, coughs or sneezes or touches hands, surfaces or objects that have the germs on them and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. The virus can survive on some surfaces for **up to 48 hours**. Adults can spread the virus beginning 1 day before symptoms start.

Signs and Symptoms

- Fever, chills, cough, body aches, headache, weakness, sore throat, stuffy nose, tiredness —usually severe and happen quickly.
- Symptoms usually last up to 7-10 days but cough may last longer.

Influenza “Flu” vaccine

- **Effective** in preventing hospitalizations by 50-60% among elderly and 80% effective in preventing death among elderly persons (CDC, April 2016).
- **Safe** and well-tolerated.
- **Needed annually** because the body’s immune response from vaccination diminishes within a year and the influenza virus does change.
- **Does not cause influenza** because it does not contain live virus.

Long Term Care

All residents with respiratory illness are placed on precautions. This means that staff and visitors wear a gown, gloves, and facial protection when they are in contact with the resident or items in the resident’s room. All residents with respiratory illness should remain in their rooms. If residents must leave their rooms, they must clean their hands and wear a mask to prevent the spread of illness to others.

During an Influenza Outbreak

An antiviral medication called Tamiflu is used to treat sick residents to reduce the severity of their illness. It is recommended that all of the well residents be started on Tamiflu prophylaxis (prevention) to stop them from becoming sick with Influenza, along with other measures to help stop the spread of the outbreak. If residents have chosen not to have influenza vaccine and do not take Tamiflu prophylaxis, then the Medical Health Officer requests that they stay in their room in order to help control the outbreak and try to protect residents from influenza.

When the Public Health Medical Health Officer declares an influenza outbreak and recommends that all residents be given Tamiflu (oseltamivir), the cost of the medication is covered by the Saskatchewan Government.

Tamiflu

Is an antiviral medication that is given to stop the spread of the influenza virus in the body and helps shorten the time that you are ill. It is most effective if started within 48 hours of symptom onset.

Tamiflu can be given in one of two ways:

- **Treatment** of residents who have influenza to help reduce the severity of disease (taken once or twice daily for a 5 day course)
- **Prevention** of influenza in residents who are well to stop them from becoming sick with influenza (both immunized and non-immunized).
(Taken once daily or every other day for the length of the outbreak.) The dose is carefully calculated for each resident specifically by your doctor and pharmacist based on your kidney function (determined from blood work), weight and overall health.
- Residents who develop symptoms during the outbreak may be switched from the lower prevention dose to the higher treatment dose

How Tamiflu works

Tamiflu works by stopping the flu virus from growing. It is used to treat symptoms of flu by making them less severe and shortens recovery time by 1 or 2 days. It can also prevent the flu if you have been exposed to it. Tamiflu is not a substitute for the influenza vaccine.

Tamiflu Side Effects

Possible side effects to Tamiflu may include nausea or vomiting. Taking this medication with food or milk helps to minimize stomach upset. Tamiflu is generally well tolerated by most people, especially at the carefully selected doses used for long term care residents. Although very rare, some people may experience a change in mood or behaviour, including confusion or agitation, or an allergic type of reaction including rash, itching or swelling. If either of these occur notify your nurse and doctor as soon as possible.