

Influenza

What is it?

- Influenza is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. There are three main types of the influenza virus: A, B and C. Types A and B are usually the viruses detected during the Influenza season, which runs between November and April each year.

How is it spread?

- Influenza is spread from person-to-person through coughing or sneezing. The droplets released by the sick person may land on the eyes, nose or mouth of a person nearby (within 2 metres), which can lead to influenza illness.
- By touching contaminated objects or surfaces with the flu virus on them and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. The virus droplets can survive for extended periods of time on surfaces or hands.

What are the symptoms?

- The symptoms include, but are not limited to, a new cough or a cough that gets worse, shortness of breath, fever, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, and tiredness. Infections in children may also be associated with some gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, while older adults may not have a fever.
- Most people recover within 5 to 7 days, however the very young and old could develop complications such as pneumonia or middle ear infections.

When do symptoms start?

- Symptoms will begin about 1-4 days after exposure to the virus; the average is 2 days.

How is it prevented?

- Immunization with the influenza vaccine is the best preventative measure; a new vaccine is required each year.
- Frequent hand washing, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue.
- Keep your hands away from your face.
- Avoid large groups and keep a distance of more than 2 metres between yourself and others.
- Stay home when you are sick.

Should I go to childcare, school or work?

- Stay home from work/school/child care until the fever has resolved and you are well enough to participate in activities.
- Health care workers should speak to their occupational health department before returning to work.

Who has a high risk of influenza-related complications or hospitalization?

- Persons of any age with certain chronic health conditions that require medical follow-up
- People of any age who are residents of long term care homes and other chronic care facilities
- People \geq 65 years of age
- Children less than 5 years of age
- Aboriginal peoples
- Pregnant women

Who can get immunized?

- In Ontario, the influenza vaccine is available for free for anyone over 6 months of age.
- Influenza vaccine is safe for pregnant women at all stages of pregnancy and for breastfeeding mothers.

For information on influenza vaccine contact the Vaccine Preventable Diseases Program at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808 ext. 5252.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control Program staff at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext. 5229.

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Available from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/naci-ccni/flu-grippe-eng.php#tphp>

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