



Demystifying Influenza

Always clean your hands well with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub, particularly after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.



What is Influenza or the Flu ?

Influenza is a respiratory illness which can affect the nose, throat and lungs. It is commonly called the Flu. The Flu can be caused by different types of influenza viruses.

Influenza usually occurs during the winter months typically between November and April.

What are the symptoms of Influenza ?

Symptoms may include:

- a cough
- sudden fever
- chills
- sore throat
- muscle aches and pains
- headache
- a tired or weak feeling

How is Influenza spread ?

Influenza virus may be spread by droplets made when people with the Flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouth or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. A person may also acquire the Flu by touching a surface or object that is contaminated with the influenza virus and then touching their own eyes, mouth or nose.

How long can a symptomatic person spread Influenza ?

People infected with influenza shed the virus and may be able to infect others anywhere from a day before they develop symptoms to up to 5-7 days after the onset of symptoms. This can be longer in some people, especially in children and those with weakened immune systems.

How severe is illness associated with Influenza ?

Each Flu season, different influenza viruses spread and affect people differently based on their bodies' ability to fight infection. Even healthy adults and children can become very ill from the Flu and spread it to friends, co-workers and family.

While Influenza can make anyone sick, certain people are at greater risk for severe illness resulting in hospitalization or death. This includes older adults, young children, and those with certain long term health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and women who are pregnant.

Influenza Patient and Public Information

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick from Influenza ?

Flu vaccine

- While there are many different influenza viruses, the Flu vaccine protects against the three viruses that research indicates will be most common for that year.
- Vaccination of high risk individuals is especially important to decrease their risk of severe illness.
- Vaccination is important for health care workers, and those who live with or care for high risk people.

Take every day actions to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illness

- Cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hand. If you use a tissue, dispose of it as soon as possible and wash your hands. .
- Decontaminate your hands often with either soap and water or alcohol based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as germs may spread.
- Try to avoid close contact with symptomatic people.
- Stay home if you are symptomatic to help prevent the spread of the influenza virus.
- Keep common surface areas – for example, doorknobs, light switches, telephones and keyboards – clean and disinfected.
- Eat healthy foods and stay physically active to keep your immune system strong.

Follow any additional precautions specified by the hospital when entering the room of a patient who is suspected or confirmed as having Influenza.

What should I do if I become ill ?

It is important to stay home while you are sick. Rest, drink plenty of fluids and take medication to lessen the fever and body aches.

Contact your family doctor for advice if your symptoms get worse. Do not visit the hospital while you are symptomatic and avoid contact with other people **except to seek medical care.**

Are there medicines to treat Influenza ?

Yes. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the influenza virus in your body. While a Flu vaccine is the first step in preventing Influenza, antiviral drugs may be prescribed as a treatment but are not a substitute for vaccination.

What happens in the hospital ?

If you have Flu-like symptoms and Influenza is confirmed by a nasal swab, then you will be placed on Additional Precautions. This means you will be assigned a toilet/bathroom or commode specifically for your use and staff will wear gloves, gown and a mask with a face shield when they are engaged in caring for you or are in your room. Staff will clean their hands before and after providing care and putting on/taking off gloves.

All this will help reduce the risk of transmission to other patients, staff and visitors.

How long should I stay home if I am sick ?

For at least 24 hours after your fever has gone, except to access medical care or other necessities. Your fever should have abated without the use of fever reducing medicine.

It is important to know that if you have some symptoms without a fever, you may still have Influenza and could potentially be infectious.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control, your family doctor or health care worker.

If you have any questions that are not answered here, please ask a nurse on your unit, or ask to speak with a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team.

For more info, visit:
www.viha.ca