

## Caring for Yourself or Family Member During an Influenza Pandemic

During an Influenza Pandemic large numbers of people will likely become sick. As a result, the health care system will face huge demands for services. The system will be under additional strain due to a reduction in the number of health care workers who are themselves sick. For this reason, it is very important to be prepared to take care of yourself and others at home as much as possible.

You may need to be home for a time during the pandemic, so it's a good idea to stock up on some basic supplies, such as food and water for several weeks. Make sure you have several days of supply of your regular medications on hand and have a list of phone numbers for family, friends, neighbours and your doctor.

Much of the time, home treatment and self-care can relieve most symptoms and reduce the risk for further problems. If you get the flu, ways to monitor and improve your health at home include:

- **Stay home if you are sick.** This will ensure that you get the rest you need and that you don't spread the virus to others ( approximately 5 days).
- **Drink lots of fluids.** This includes water, real juice, milk and herbal tea. It is best to have drinks without caffeine, because caffeine actually makes you lose fluid from your body. If your urine (pee) is darker than usual, you need to drink more fluids.
- **Offer small, nutritious meals.** People sick with the flu may not be very hungry.
- **Take basic pain/fever relievers.** Use acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempera) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Use the dose and schedule recommended on the package. Acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age with the flu because it can lead to brain and liver damage (Reye's Syndrome). If feverish, dress in lightweight clothing and keep the room temperature around 20°C.
- **Use a hot water bottle or heating pad.** Applying heat carefully, for short periods of time, can help reduce muscle pain. Check the skin often when using a heating pad because the pad can cause burns and blisters.
- **Get lots of rest.**
- **Take a warm bath with Epsom salt.**
- **Gargle with salt water if you have a sore throat or use lozenges.**
- **Use a cool mist humidifier to help with a stuffy nose or saline (salt & water) nose drops.**
- **Avoid sharing anything that may carry germs.** This includes towels, lipstick, drinks, toys. Clean surfaces regularly with regular household cleaners.
- **Wash your hands often.** Use soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds each

time or alcohol-based hand cleaners if water is not available. This will help you avoid spreading the flu to others.

### **When to Seek Medical Attention**

Several factors can complicate the decision to seek medical attention. They may include existing health problems, age or current medication. You may get advice from Telehealth Ontario's confidential telephone service (available 24 hours/7 days per week) at 1-866-797-0000 or your family doctor/general practitioner.

If your symptoms are severe and you think you need immediate attention go to the closest hospital emergency department or call 911.

If you are a **normally healthy adult** and have been suffering with the flu, it is time to call your doctor, health line or 911 if you have the following:

- Shortness of breath while resting or doing very little.
- Breathing is difficult or painful.
- Chest pain.
- Coughing up bloody sputum.
- Wheezing.
- Symptoms improve and then suddenly become worst.
- Extreme drowsiness, difficulty awakening, disorientation, confusion.
- New inability to function, if an independent elder.
- Persistent vomiting, if elderly.

Seek medical attention as soon as possible in order to prevent your condition from worsening. Bacteria may have infected your damaged tissues. At this point your health care provider may consider giving you an antibiotic.

If you have heart or lung disease or any other chronic conditions that requires regular medical attention, if you are frail, if you have an illness, or if you are on treatments or medications that affect your immune system and you get the flu call your health care provider. Antiviral medication may be available and must be taken within 48 hours of the first symptoms to be effective.

### **Children and Influenza**

The Canadian Paediatric Society has excellent resources for parents and caregivers of children. Please go to the web site at [www.caringforkids.cps.ca/whensick/influenza](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/whensick/influenza) for more detailed information about the disease. A summary of key points follows.

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Children are most likely to be infected with influenza and are the major spreaders of the disease. They are infectious longer than adults (up to 7 days after the appearance of symptoms). Influenza viruses are found in the nose and throat. Because children touch their nose, eyes and mouths often, put things in their mouths, and touch each other often during play, flu germs spread easily. There is also a lot of contact between parents or caregivers and children such as holding hands, picking up, feeding, changing diapers and so on.

### **How to Recognize Influenza in Children**

Influenza usually begins with sudden fever, chills and shakes, headaches, muscle aches,

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extreme tiredness, dry cough and sore throat. Loss of appetite is common. People with the flu generally feel very sick and want to stay in bed.

Although children with the influenza may have many of the same symptoms as adults, there are some differences:

- Newborn and infants may have a high fever that can't be explained, and no other signs.
- Young children usually have temperatures over 39.5°C and may have febrile seizures (convulsions).
- Influenza is an important cause of croup (an infection of the throat and vocal cords), pneumonia (lung infection) and bronchiolitis (infection of the tiny airways that lead to the lungs) in young children.
- Stomach upset, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal (stomach) pain are more common in young children. Ear aches and red eyes are also more common.
- In some cases, muscle swelling can lead to severe leg or back pain.

Influenza illness is more severe in children under 5 years of age and in children with certain chronic conditions.