

preparing for

Pandemic Influenza



Winnipeg Regional
Health Authority

Office régional de la
santé de Winnipeg

Caring for Health

À l'écoute de notre santé

Fact Sheet – Self Care for Influenza

This fact sheet provides basic health information and advice for you, if you are sick at home with influenza or if you are caring for a sick person in your home

How do I know if I have influenza?

Infection with influenza can cause a wide range of illness. Many people who become ill may only have mild symptoms. Some people who get infected with the virus may not get sick at all.

Symptoms of Influenza

When you have influenza, you may get sick very suddenly with:

- Fever, which is a temperature greater than 38° C **AND**
- Cough **AND**
- One or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, joint aches, or fatigue and feeling very tired or exhausted

Other symptoms can include:

- Chills
- Loss of appetite
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffed nose

Note:

- Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea
- Elderly and immune-compromised people may not develop a fever
- Most people recover in 7-10 days

How do I prevent the spread of infection?

There are simple steps you can take to help prevent the spread of infection:

- Stay home and rest if you have the symptoms of influenza, even if you are not very sick
- Stay away from work, school, day nursery and public events. You should remain at home for a minimum of 7 days after your illness began or until you/your child are feeling completely better, whatever is longer. If you are ill and must leave your home to visit a health care provider, you must call ahead to the clinic and you may be asked to put on a mask to protect others

How do I prevent the spread of infection? (...continued)

- Cover your cough
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze **OR** cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands
 - Put your used tissue in the waste basket
 - Wash your hands frequently (use soap and water or hand rubs)
- At home, make sure that the person who is sick has their own room and if possible their own bathroom to use
- Try to limit person-to-person contact and wherever possible, keep a distance of three feet between the sick person and any healthy persons
- Dispose of facial tissues and personal disposable items in the garbage
- **DON'T FORGET – WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY!**

How do I know if I have a fever?

Fever is a sign that the body is fighting an infection or other illness. Sometimes we think someone has a fever by simply touching their forehead or neck but the only way to really know if someone has a fever is by checking their temperature. We can measure a person's temperature by using a thermometer placed in the mouth, the ear or under the armpit. You can buy a thermometer at your local drug store. The use of glass mercury thermometers is not recommended.

You or your child have a fever if the mouth, ear or under the armpit temperature is 38°C (100.4°F) or higher.

Care of a Fever

- Dress in lightweight clothing and keep room temperature to 20°C
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Offer small, nutritious meals
- Use acetaminophen (Tylenol or Temptra) or ibuprophen (Advil) to lower their temperature. Do not give ASA or aspirin to anyone under the age of 18 because it can cause Reye's Syndrome, a potentially fatal disease

How can I treat other symptoms of influenza?

The best ways to treat the symptoms of influenza are:

- Get plenty of rest
- Gargle with salt water if you have a sore throat
- Use a cool mist humidifier to help with a stuffy nose
- If a baby is having problems breathing because of a stuffy nose, use a rubber suction bulb to clear the mucous. These are available at drug stores. You may also use saline nose drops or spray if the mucous is very thick
- Water, juices, clear broths and soups help replace the loss of fluids
- Warm fluids may help loosen up mucus in your throat and lungs
- People with very serious illness, such as those hospitalized or those with other health problems may be prescribed antiviral medication.

There are many over-the-counter cough and cold medicines that do not require a doctor's prescription. These include decongestants, cough syrups, nasal drops, and antihistamines. These medicines do not necessarily work and may not be safe in some cases. They should not be given to children under three years of age unless prescribed by a doctor.

Check with your pharmacist or doctor before giving these medicines to anyone else or taking them yourself. This is especially important for children under 12 years of age, persons on other medications, or persons with a chronic medical condition.

When should I see a doctor or seek emergency care?

It may be hard to decide if and when you should see a doctor or seek emergency medical care. Here are some recommendations that will help you decide:

Emergency Care:

Seek emergency medical care if you feel so sick that you cannot stay at home.

- If you feel you need medical care on an emergency basis, go to the Misericordia Urgent Care Centre, a hospital emergency department, or call 911
- If you are going to Urgent Care or to a hospital emergency department, call ahead to let them know you are coming and tell them that you think you may have influenza A
- Ask the hospital for specific instructions regarding where you should go when you get there and whom you should notify when you arrive
- If possible, put on a mask before you arrive at Urgent Care or the emergency department
- If you haven't done so already, you will be asked to put on a mask when you arrive at Urgent Care or the hospital

Adults:

Adults should call a doctor or Health Links-Info Santé at 788-8200 if they have any of the following:

- Breathing is difficult or painful
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing up blood
- Increased wheezing
- Fever for 3-4 days without getting better
- Feeling better then suddenly having a high fever or becoming sick again
- Extreme sleepiness, are difficult to wake up or being disoriented or confused
- Extreme ear pain

To prevent the condition from worsening see a doctor as soon as possible. Antiviral medications or antibiotics may be considered at this time. If you are too sick to phone the doctor, call 911.

You should call your doctor right away if you have symptoms of influenza and any of the following conditions:

- Chronic heart or lung disease
- Any other chronic condition (that requires regular visits to the doctor's office)
- Persons who are very old and frail
- Persons who are on treatments or medication that affect the immune system

If your regular doctor cannot be reached, call Health Links-Info Santé (788-8200) for information on how to access health services.

Children:

Contact your doctor or take a child to an emergency department when they have symptoms of influenza and:

- Have chronic lung or heart disease
- Have an illness or is taking treatments that affect the immune system
- Takes acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin) regularly for a medical condition
- Have any other chronic illness requiring regular medical care
- Is less than 3 months old and has a temperature over 38.5°C
- Has trouble breathing when resting, is wheezing, has chest pain when breathing. or is coughing up bloody sputum (phlegm)
- Drinks very little fluid and has not urinated at least every 6 hours when awake.
- Has vomiting or diarrhea
- Is constantly irritable and will not calm down
- Is listless, not interested in playing with toys or unusually sleepy
- Still has a fever and is not feeling better after 5 days
- Was feeling better and suddenly develops a new fever

Important:

Take the child to a hospital emergency department immediately or call 911 if the child:

- Has severe breathing trouble or blue lips
- Is limp or unable to move
- Is hard to wake up or does not respond
- Has stiff neck
- Seems confused
- Has a seizure (convulsion/fit)