



Influenza

What is it?

Flu is the short term for influenza. It is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. The flu virus attacks suddenly, causing fever, headache, tiredness, muscle aches and pain, runny nose, sneezing or congestion, swollen or tender glands in the throat, sore throat and a dry cough. Sometimes nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea may also occur.

Complications of influenza include pneumonia, bronchitis and tracheobronchitis. For certain persons these complications can be very serious.

How is it spread?

It is spread through the air from the sneeze or cough of an infected person or from direct contact with discharges from the nose or throat of infected persons.

What is the incubation period?

It takes about one to three days from the time a person comes in contact with the infected secretions until they develop symptoms.

What about infectiousness?

The first three days of illness are the most contagious time because there is more virus in nose and throat secretions. Young children are infectious for about seven days because they have more secretions and take longer to make antibodies.

Certain people are at risk for serious complications from an influenza infection.

They are:

- Persons with chronic heart or lung conditions.
- Persons with chronic conditions such as diabetes and other metabolic diseases, cancer, immunodeficiency (including HIV infection), immunosuppression (including transplant recipients), renal disease, anaemia, and blood disorders.
- Children (age six months to 18 years) treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid.
- Persons who reside in nursing homes or other chronic care facilities.
- Persons older than 65 years of age.
- Healthy children aged six to 23 months.

- People at high risk of influenza complications embarking on travel destinations where influenza is likely to be circulating.

Certain persons are capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk for complications.



They are:

- Health care providers who work in facilities and community settings (physicians, nurses and emergency response workers).
- Health care personnel and other persons who work or visit in hospitals or long-term facilities.
- Those who provide home care to persons in high-risk groups.
- Those who provide services within closely or relatively closed settings to persons at high risk (e.g., crew on a cruise ship).
- Those providing regular child care to children aged zero to 23 months, whether in or out of the home.
- Household contacts (adults and children) of people at high risk of influenza complications. This includes household contacts of children under six months who are at high risk but for whom there is no vaccine and of children aged six to 23 months, whether or not they have been immunized. Pregnant women, who will deliver during influenza season, should be immunized during their third trimester because they will become household contacts of their newborn babies.

- Persons who provide essential community services.
- Persons directly involved in the culling operation of avian infected poultry.

How can I protect myself and others?

- Get influenza vaccine annually. Each year the strains of influenza virus are different and the vaccine changes in an attempt to match the circulating virus.
- Practice good hand washing.
- Do not visit susceptible persons or facilities if you are experiencing any symptoms that could be symptoms of influenza.

For more information, please contact a member of Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit's Infectious Disease Team.

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