

Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family: What to Do If You Get Pandemic Flu

This fact sheet provides information about how to care for yourself at home if you become sick with pandemic flu.

Taking Care of Yourself At Home

During a flu pandemic, many people will be sick, however, half of these people will not require medical care. For this reason, it is very important to be prepared to take care of yourself and others at home.

How to Care For Yourself

If you get the flu during a pandemic, you can monitor and improve your health in the following ways:

General Practices

- Wash your hands often using soap and warm, running water for at least 15 seconds or more each time or use a hand sanitizer with 60 to 90 per cent alcohol, particularly after coughing or blowing your nose.
- Stay home if you are sick so that you don't spread the virus to others.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Cover your sneeze and cough and dispose of tissues immediately.

Symptom Control

- Drink lots of fluids, including water or ice chips, fruit juice (not fruit drinks), milk, and herbal teas.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine as caffeine makes you lose fluid from your body.
- Take basic pain or fever relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen.

- Do not give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) to children or teenagers under the age of 16.
- Apply heat for short periods of time using a hot water bottle or heating pad to reduce muscle pain.
- Take cough medicine. This helps especially if you have a dry cough.
- Take a warm bath with Epsom salts.
- Gargle with a glass of warm water or suck on hard candy or lozenges.
- Use saline drops or spray for a stuffy nose.
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco.
- Ask your pharmacist for advice if you buy over-the-counter medicine.
- Call someone to help you if you are alone, are a single parent of young children, or are responsible for the care of someone who is frail or has a disability.

Environmental Control

- Avoid sharing anything that may carry germs such as towels, lipstick, drinks or toys.
- Keep sick person's dishes, kitchen utensils and towels separate from the rest of the family.
- Clean hard surfaces such as door handles and kitchen countertops more frequently.

When Should You Seek Further Help?

If you do not start to feel better in a few days or your symptoms get worse, call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000 (TTY-1-866-797-0007) or seek help right away. Before visiting your doctor, call and let him or her know about your symptoms so that you don't infect other people at the office.

Also, call your doctor right away if you experience flu symptoms and

- have heart or lung disease;
- have any other chronic health problems that require regular medical attention;
- are elderly or frail; or
- have an illness or are on treatments that affect your immune system: diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS.

Your doctor may prescribe antiviral medication if necessary. Antibiotics may be necessary to treat secondary infections such as bacterial pneumonia.

If special clinics for people with the flu or flu-like symptoms have been set up, your doctor's office might ask you to go there instead.

When Should Your Child See A Doctor?

Seek medical care for children right away if you notice any of the following signs:

- Fast or difficulty breathing;
- Bluish or dark-coloured lips or skin color;
- Drowsiness to the point that you cannot wake your child up;
- Severe crankiness or not wanting to be held;
- Not drinking enough fluids or is showing signs of dehydration (e.g., not going to the bathroom (peeing) regularly); or
- Symptoms improve and then suddenly become worse.

For More Information

Visit our website at

www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic

Call INFOline 1-866-801-7242

TTY 1-800-387-5550