

Staying Healthy During a Flu Pandemic

This fact sheet provides precautions for reducing the risk of infection from pandemic flu.

How Flu Is Spread

The flu, or influenza, is a highly infectious respiratory disease caused by a virus that infects the nose, throat, and lungs. Pandemic flu occurs when a new subtype of flu virus, for which people have not built up any immunity, appears or emerges in the population and quickly infects large numbers of people throughout the world.

The flu spreads easily from person to person through coughing and sneezing and from touching your eyes, mouth, or nose. However, the ability of the influenza virus to be transmitted through the air cannot be entirely ruled out.

When infected persons cough or sneeze they emit tiny droplets or small particles that can be inhaled or come into contact with the mouth, nose, and eyes of others. Hand-to-hand contact with an infected person or handling objects contaminated by the infected person and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose can also lead to infection.

People with flu are infectious and able to transmit the virus for up to 24 hours before symptoms appear. Adults are infectious for three to five days after symptoms appear while children are infectious for up to seven days after symptoms appear. (**Note:** the period of infectiousness is based on how seasonal influenza is transmitted and may change in a pandemic)

How to Keep from Getting Sick

Take the following steps to stay healthy during a flu pandemic:

1. Practise Good Health Habits

- Eat well, including plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole grain products.
- Drink lots of water and avoid heavy alcohol consumption.
- Exercise on a regular basis and get plenty of rest.

2. Make Good Hygiene a Habit

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm, running water for at least 15 seconds or more each time, or use a hand sanitizer with 60 per cent to 90 per cent alcohol content.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully put them in bags and put the bags in the garbage container.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing using soap and warm, running water for 15 seconds or more each time, or use a hand sanitizer containing 60 to 90 per cent alcohol.
- Stay home if you are sick so that you don't spread your germs to others.
- Stay away from people who are sick, if this is practical. You should especially try to stay at least one meter (three feet) away from people sick with flu like illness.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Avoid public gatherings and crowds.
- Don't share eating utensils or drinks.
- If a family member is sick, keep their personal items such as towels and toothbrushes separate from those of the rest of the family.

3. Use Public Health Services

- Get a flu shot each year; it won't protect you against pandemic flu, but it can help you to stay healthy.
- If you are over 65 years of age, ask your doctor for a shot to protect you against pneumococcal infection.
- Take antiviral medication if recommended by your doctor.

For More Information

Visit our website at

www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic

Call INFOline 1-866-801-7242

TTY 1-800-387-5559