

Influenza Information Sheet

What is Influenza?

Influenza, commonly called the flu, is a very contagious respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. Anyone can get influenza, but older adults and people with chronic medical conditions are more vulnerable. The usual flu season is from November to April.

Is it flu or a common cold?

Influenza symptoms are much worse than cold symptoms. Influenza symptoms typically involve sudden onset of headache, chills and cough followed rapidly by a fever, appetite loss, muscle aches and tiredness.

Common cold symptoms are limited to the upper respiratory tract and include runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes and throat irritation.

How does it spread?

Influenza is spread very easily from person-to-person by coughing and sneezing. The Influenza virus can live for hours on mucous or hands. Influenza can be spread to others 3 days before symptoms appear and up to 3 to 5 days after the onset of symptoms.

How can it be prevented?

- Yearly vaccination is the only proven effective method of prevention, preferably 2 weeks before the beginning of the active flu season. The vaccine is very safe, and prevents the flu in 70% of people who get immunized. For others, it reduces the severity of symptoms, and complications such as pneumonia.
- Maintain hygienic practices such as hand washing, especially after contact with people who may have the flu and after handling soiled tissues. This will reduce the risk of being infected.
- Stay healthy by eating nutritiously, exercising regularly and by getting adequate rest.

Is there any treatment for the flu?

Prevention through vaccination is the best way to prevent infection, but new antiviral medications can be prescribed for people who do get sick. Antiviral medications help to reduce the sick period by 1 or 2 days if started within 48 hours after onset of the illness. Those who are infected should rest and increase fluid intake such as water or juice, and stay away from work or school until symptoms have resolved.

September 3, 2002

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Services *Health Connection*
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*Health Services Department, Public Health Branch
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