

# INFLUENZA CARE FACT SHEET

## Home care

Most people with influenza will be able to remain at home during the course of their illness and can be cared for by other family members or others who live in the household.

- When care is provided by a household member, basic infection control precautions should be followed.
- Infection within the household may be minimized if a primary caregiver is identified:
- ideally the primary care giver is someone who does not have an underlying condition that places them at increased risk of severe influenza disease.

The use of face masks by the patient and/or caregiver may be of some benefit in the home care setting

### Keeping others safe:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose.
- Throw out used tissues in the bin as soon as you can.
- Always wash your hands after sneezing, blowing your nose, or coughing, or after touching used tissues or handkerchiefs.
- Wash hands often if you are sick.
- Use warm water and soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizers to wash your hands.
- Try to stay home if you have a cough and fever.
- See your doctor as soon as you can if you have a cough and fever, and follow their instructions, including taking medicine as prescribed and getting lots of rest.
- If asked to, use face masks provided in your doctor's waiting room; follow instructions to help stop the spread of germs.

## Care for those with influenza

- Home Care
- Keeping others safe
- When to seek medical advice

ISSUED: May 2008

Persons who have a sudden onset of influenza-like symptoms (e.g. headache, fever, chills, cough, chest pain, sore throat, muscle aches, weakness, and exhaustion) should do the following:

- Remain at home at least until all symptoms have resolved in adults for three-five days and up to seven days for young children
- Take medication as needed to relieve the symptoms of the flu.
- Fever-reducing medications: seek advice from your doctor or pharmacist regarding the type of medication and frequency of use

**Never** give *aspirin* to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms (and particularly fever) without first speaking to your doctor.

- Giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome.

A person's fluid needs are greater when that person has fever. Drink lots of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated.

- Start with sips of any fluid other than caffeinated beverages. Drinking too much fluid at once can bring on more vomiting. Electrolyte solutions are available from the chemist.

If you have *diarrhoea*, it's a good idea to rest, eat only small amounts of food at a time, and drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Avoid sports drinks as they can cause diarrhoea.

# When to seek medical advice

- Seek advice from your doctor or pharmacist about medications to help with the symptoms of diarrhoea.

Ideally, a **digital thermometer** is used for recording temperatures

- It is important to use a new disposable sleeve every time you use the digital thermometer

*Those with 'flu should not leave the home during the period when they are most likely to be infectious to others (i.e., up to five days after onset of symptoms).*

- Keep at least one metre away from others
- Physically separate those with 'flu from others in the home as much as possible.
- Restrict visitors to your home get plenty of bed rest
- Do not smoke

Wash hands often with warm soap and water for 15-20 seconds or use alcohol based sanitising hand gels if hand washing is not possible

- Do not rub eyes, touch nose or mouth
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
  - Place tissues into a waste bag immediately after use and don't re-use them
  - Wash hands after using tissues

Persons should seek **medical attention** at their doctor's surgery or the nearest hospital emergency department if they are at high risk for the development of complications

- People age 65 and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions and very young children are more likely to get complications from influenza.
- Pregnant women also have an increased risk for pneumonia, lung insufficiency, and death after an influenza infection.

## In children:

- High or prolonged fever
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin colour
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Changes in mental status, somnolence, irritability
- Seizures, confusion or seizures
- Influenza-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions (for example, heart or lung disease, diabetes)
- Severe or persistent vomiting [two to three times in 24 hours] (vomiting is usually present in young children with influenza infection)
- Cough becomes productive of yellow sputum

## In adults:

- High or prolonged fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Cough becomes productive of yellow sputum
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Near-fainting or fainting
- Confusion or seizures
- Severe or persistent vomiting [two to three times in 24 hours] (vomiting is usually present in elderly persons with influenza infection)
- Skin colour changes (lip and hands)
- Cough becomes productive of yellow sputum