



Public Information Series

Family Preparedness Fact Sheet

The flu, also known as influenza, is a common infection of the airways and lungs that can spread easily among humans. In Canada, flu season begins in the fall and ends in the spring. The type of flu people get during this season is called seasonal flu. Sometimes, a new type of flu virus may emerge to which people have no resistance. When this happens, it can spread more easily from person to person around the world in a very short time. This is pandemic flu.

The exact symptoms of pandemic flu are unknown. However, they are expected to be similar to those of seasonal flu, which are:

- fever
- sore throat
- sudden on-set headache
- muscle aches and pains
- stomach problems, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea

Contact a health care provider if you have any questions about specific symptoms or visit the following website: www.fightflu.ca

Pandemic Flu: the Illness

Pandemic flu is more serious than seasonal flu. Most people who get seasonal flu recover within a week or two and do not require medical treatment. The very young, the very old and the very sick are most likely to become seriously ill from seasonal flu. Pandemic flu is different because people of every age may be at risk of illness.

Pandemic Flu: the Event

An influenza pandemic is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza virus, to which people have little or no immunity, appears in the human population. It causes an illness that spreads easily from person to person worldwide.

In the 20th century, flu pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968. The 1918 pandemic led to high levels of illness, death, social disruption and economic loss.

Pandemic Flu: Prevention

There are some things that everyone can do to slow the spread of the flu and reduce its impact, whatever kind it is. Some of these actions are:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or clean them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often.
- Wash hands for at least 15 seconds.
- When using soap and water, first wet hands with water, apply an amount of product recommended by the manufacturer to hands, and rub hands together vigorously, covering all surfaces of the hands, giving attention to fingernails and surfaces where jewelry is worn. Rinse hands with water and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel. Use towel to turn off faucet.
- When using an alcohol-based sanitizer, use directed amount of sanitizer, rub thoroughly over all surfaces of the hands, including nail areas and between the fingers. Rub until product dries.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and clean your hands afterwards with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. If tissueless, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm, not your hands.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth to keep germs from entering your body.
- Stay home if you are feeling sick.
- Talk to your health care provider about the annual flu shot

Finding out the answers to your questions ahead of time will have a significant impact on your preparedness plans and decisions during a flu pandemic.



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Contact your local Red Cross Branch for personal preparedness information. Contact a health care provider if you have any questions. For more information, visit www.redcross.ca, www.fightflu.ca and www.pandemic.cpha.ca.

- Ask your child's school or day care if they plan to encourage sick children to stay home during a flu pandemic or what their plans are to handle service delivery during a pandemic.

Pandemic Flu: Preparedness

During a flu pandemic, you may be required to stay home to help family members who have taken ill or may get ill yourself. You and your family and friends may need to rely on each other.

Think about how you handle stress and know your strengths. Take steps to plan for, get through and recover from a flu pandemic.

- Store a supply of food for up to two weeks that does not require refrigeration, preparation or cooking. Ensure that formula for infants and any child's or older person's special nutritional needs are a part of your planning. Plan for your pets as well.
- Store a supply of water (minimum of 2 litres of water per person per day) for up to two weeks, in clean plastic containers.
- Store a supply of any nonprescription drugs, such as pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, stomach remedies and anti-diarrheal medication, as well as vitamins and fluids with electrolytes (such as sports drinks).
- Store a supply of prescriptions medication. Don't wait until the last minute to refill your prescriptions.
- Store health and cleaning supplies, such as tissues, a thermometer, disposable gloves, soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick.
- Ask your employer about plans to have staff stay home when they are sick or when a family member is sick.
- Find out your employer's plans to keep the business functioning if key staff can't come to work.