

Flu Prevention

With the change of seasons comes a renewed focus on the flu and the ways we can protect ourselves against infection.

Influenza is a highly contagious viral infection. Up to ten per cent of the Canadian population is affected by the flu each year. Those that are generally healthy will experience symptoms to varying degrees and recover fully in a week to ten days. But for young children, the elderly or those with chronic illness, the flu can be life-threatening. Preventing infection in the first place is key.

There are many variations of the viruses that cause the flu, and they also change over time. Based on viral strains or families, vaccines can be developed for use against infection. As these strains change somewhat each year, the vaccine is updated annually.

Viruses are spread through direct contact (within one to two metres, airborne transmission) or indirect contact (surfaces). Signs and symptoms of the seasonal flu vary from one person to another but usually include a combination of:

- fever
- sore throat
- headaches
- fatigue
- cough
- runny nose
- muscle aches and pains

Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can also occur.

Prevention

- Wash your hands often, using plenty of soap and warm water. Germs can live on surfaces for up to 48 hours.
- Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often throughout the day.
- Disinfect common surfaces in your home such as doorknobs and light switches. At work, disinfect items such as your keyboard and telephone.
- Cover your mouth when you cough, and sneeze into a tissue or the inside of your sleeve.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth to keep germs from entering your body.
- If you become sick, stay at home. This will prevent the spread of germs to other employees in your workplace as well as people you may come into contact with through your daily routine.
- Talk to your health care provider about the annual flu shot and if that would be the right option for you and your family.