

June 2005

General points on influenza patient care

This fact sheet provides basic information for health care workers.

Typical influenza infections

- A sudden fever (38°C or higher) and cough are the main indicators for influenza when it is prevalent in the community. Other non-specific symptoms may include sore throat, runny nose, chills, weakness, and aching muscles.
- With adequate fluids and bed rest, most patients recover from influenza without serious complications. Their temperature returns to normal over six days. Respiratory symptoms may increase, but lung capacity is unaffected. There is lingering fatigue and weakness for up to six weeks.

Individuals at risk of complications

- Individuals with chronic lung conditions, heart conditions, or conditions requiring regular medical attention;
- Frail individuals or those receiving treatment that affects their immune system;
- Pregnant women in second/third trimester;
- Children two years and younger.

Watch if patient

- Is difficult to wake or extremely drowsy, disoriented or confused.
- Starts to wheeze.
- Has trouble breathing.
- Coughs up bloody sputum.
- Develops severe ear pain.
- Improves, then develops a second high fever.

Spread of influenza

- Infected people transmit the virus for seven days or longer, beginning the day before first symptoms appear.
- Infections occur through proximity to ill people when they are sneezing, coughing or talking, or through touching your nose, mouth or eyes after touching infected people or objects where the virus has landed, such as door knobs, telephones, dishes and handrails.
- The virus lives longer in cool, dry places, from 24 to 48 hours on hard non-porous surfaces, 8 to 12 hours on cloth/paper/tissue, and 5 minutes on unwashed hands.
- Isolation and cohorted care are necessary during triage and assessment, whether in acute or non-acute care settings, to avoid infecting uninfected patients.

Protection for family caregivers

- Family caregivers should practice scrupulous hand hygiene and use a mask or tissue to cover their mouth when coughing.
- Families should separate the personal items of infected people, e.g. towels, and clean any household items which they use, e.g. telephones and bathroom fixtures.

For more information

www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/emu_mn.html

Or call toll free:

Health Care Provider's Hotline 1-866-212-2272