

Public Health

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Public Health Measures During an Influenza Pandemic

Remember: there is currently no influenza pandemic in the world.

Will I need to stay home during a pandemic if I am sick?

People who are sick with influenza (the flu) during a pandemic will likely be asked to stay home. This will expose fewer people to the illness and could help to delay the spread of disease.

While at home, sick people should minimize contact with household members who are not sick. They should also make sure they wash their hands frequently; cover their mouth when they cough; and cover their mouth and nose when they sneeze.

During an influenza pandemic, public health officials will give specific instructions.

Will I need to stay home if I have been in contact with an infected person?

At this point in time, we expect that during a pandemic people who have been exposed to the flu but are feeling well will not need to stay home. However, they should watch carefully for flu symptoms. If they develop symptoms, then they should stay home.

Public health officials will give specific advice about this during a flu pandemic.

The following additional precautions are also recommended:

- Wash your hands frequently and cover your mouth when coughing.
- Postpone nonessential travel, particularly to areas where there is no disease.
- Postpone visits to anyone who is at high risk of complications from flu infection, such as seniors or infants.
- Persons who have been exposed to the flu at their place of employment (ex: health care workers) should follow directions given by their employer and/or public health officials.

Will I need to stay home if I am well?

During a flu pandemic, it will be important to carry on life as normally as possible. Keeping our communities functioning will depend on those who are able to work doing so. As a result, healthy people should continue with their normal activities.

How about schools and child care facilities?

Children transmit influenza easily. During a flu pandemic, public health officials may recommend or order school closures in some circumstances, particularly if the flu virus is causing a lot of illness among school-age children.

However, if schools and child care facilities are closed, it may mean children gather in groups at other places, such as a community centre or a neighbour's home. This would make the closures an ineffective way to halt the spread of flu infection because children would still likely spread the virus from one to another. Also, essential workers may be unable to go to work if schools and child care centres are closed, since they may need to look after their children at home. For these and other reasons, school and child care authorities will collaborate with public health officials during a pandemic response.

Will I need to wear a mask during a pandemic?

During a pandemic, and under specific circumstances, people who are sick with the flu or those caring for them may be advised to wear surgical masks to reduce the spread of disease.

However, people who are not sick and are participating in their everyday activities will not be advised to wear masks because:

- it would likely be difficult to sustain this measure through the duration of a pandemic;
- masks can provide a false sense of security of protection against infection; and
- if improperly handled, masks can increase the potential for infection.

This advice will be re-evaluated at the time of a pandemic.

Will everyone have to check their temperature daily?

This has not shown to be effective in the past and is unlikely to be recommended in most circumstances. There are exceptions, however. One such exception might be after a known exposure to someone who has influenza.

Temperature screening in public places also is not known to be effective and unlikely to be implemented during a pandemic.

What about traveling during a pandemic?

During a flu pandemic, public health officials may issue travel advisories that recommend no travel to areas known to be affected by influenza. Alternately, they may issue advisories to discourage travel from an affected area to one that is not known to have the disease circulating in the community.

For more information

While there is no pandemic influenza in Canada or anywhere else in the world at this time, it is important to understand key facts about public health preparedness activities and how a public health response to a flu pandemic will be handled in Manitoba. For more information on public health and government preparedness activities, please visit www.gov.mb.ca/pandemic