



Influenza Information

For
The Ontario Fire Service

December 22, 2003



Office of the Fire Marshal
Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services

with the continuing assistance of

Emergency Health Services Branch
Ministry of Health and Long Term Care

Introduction:

Influenza continues to be a serious health concern. According to the Health Canada statement issued on December 20, 2003, “although the 2004 influenza season arrived earlier than in previous years, and appears to be more severe than the last three seasons, current national and international data indicate that its impact in Canada is still within the expected range.”

Health Canada is tracking the outbreaks of influenza across Canada. The latest weekly report available (week ending December 13, 2003) shows widespread activity in Ontario and British Columbia. That week, there were 385 confirmed cases of Influenza A throughout Ontario. For the season to date (August 24, 2003 to December 13, 2003), there were 753 cases confirmed. For information on the location of outbreaks of influenza log onto www.healthcanada.ca/flu then click on Fluwatch.

The World Health Organization’s website has considerable information on influenza and its spread around the world.

<http://rhone.b3e.jussieu.fr/flunet/www/>

The 2003/04-influenza season will pose some new challenges for emergency services following the recent SARS outbreaks in Ontario. Influenza and SARS are similar in their signs and symptoms, making differentiation between the two diseases difficult in prehospital care settings.

What is Influenza?

Comprehensive information can be found at various websites including:

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care at:
www.health.gov.on.ca

Health Canada at:
www.healthcanada.ca/flu

In your local area, contact your local Public Health Unit for information.

Signs and Symptoms of Influenza:

A person is considered contagious and can spread the influenza virus one (1) day before the onset of symptoms and while the person is symptomatic. Influenza symptoms usually come on suddenly and may include any of the following signs and symptoms:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Body aches
- Dry cough
- Loss of appetite
- Nasal congestion

Nausea and vomiting may accompany influenza infection, especially in children, but these are not common symptoms. Sometimes influenza can be mistaken for the common cold, however, in most cases flu onset is faster and symptoms are more severe than a cold.

Most people who get influenza will recover in one to two weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications. Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections are complications. Influenza routinely makes chronic health problems worse. For example, asthmatics may experience severe asthma attacks.

If you are concerned about your health or others, Health and Long Term Care Minister, George Smitherson reminds Ontarians “not to forget Telehealth Ontario”. Telehealth Ontario provides everyone in Ontario with free telephone access, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to registered nurses who can answer healthcare questions ranging from assessing symptoms, to providing information on community health resources. The service is confidential.

Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000 TTY line is 1-866-797-0007

How is the Influenza Virus Transmitted?

The influenza virus is highly contagious and most commonly transmitted from one person to another by small-particle aerosols produced from a cough, sneeze or talking. The virus enters the body through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, and mouth. The virus can also be acquired through hand-to-hand contact with an infected person or through equipment contaminated with the virus.

How to reduce the risk of influenza for you, other fire service personnel and the public?

Immunization:

There is clear scientific evidence that immunization each year is the most effective way to prevent being infected with the influenza virus. It is not too late to receive immunization; Health Canada considers that the Flu season continues until March 31, 2004.

If you have not been immunized, contact your physician or contact your local Public Health Unit or **Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 The TTY line is 1-866-797-0007.**

When in the office or station:

- Wash hands thoroughly and frequently
- Avoid sharing eating utensils or other personal items
- Stay home when ill (follow departmental SOGs)
- Cover mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing
- Dispose used tissues in a proper container
- Keep hands, unless just washed, away from your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth

When dealing with medical calls:

Continue to apply routine practices and additional precautions for preventing the transmission of infection, especially infectious respiratory diseases. This is not only during influenza season, but at all times. Routine use of these practices not only reduces the incidences of cross infection of patients, especially the most vulnerable, but also the incidences of infection transmission to co-workers, family and the public. Such best practices include:

- Washing hands thoroughly before and after caring for each patient with soap and water, or in the absence of running water, using an alcohol based sanitizer for a minimum of fifteen (15) seconds.
- Wearing clean, non-sterile gloves for all patient contacts in which there is a risk of infectious disease exposure or contamination from body fluids.
- Wear an N95 mask or equivalent respirator when encountering any patient with respiratory symptoms suggestive of infection.
- Wear other appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including protective eyewear and gowns/coveralls when dealing

with patients who are suspected of having an infectious respiratory disease.

- Discard disposable equipment appropriately and ensure that non-disposable equipment is cleaned and disinfected prior to being used on another patient.

Refer to SARS bulletins found on the OFM website:

- *#1 March 26, 2003 for proper wearing of N95 masks,*
- *#2 April 1, 2003 for procedures for wearing eye protection and hand washing,*
- *#6 May 20, 2003 for information on the “new normal” contained in the “Directive to All Ontario Prehospital Care Providers and Ambulance Communication Services issued by the SARS Provincial Operations Centre (May 13, 2003)*
- *#10 August 12, 2003 for Direction for Paramedics and EMS Providers on use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in relation to Patients with Respiratory Symptoms.*

To ensure co-ordination of procedures and practices, liaise with your local EMS Director/Manager.

Note:

Much of this information was derived from the “Training Bulletin Influenza Educational Review 2003/2004” issued October 2003 by Emergency Health Services Branch, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care