



INFORMATION

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PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFLUENZA DURING A PANDEMIC

Scientists agree that an influenza (flu) pandemic – the worldwide spread of a new strain of influenza virus against which humans have little or no immunity – is inevitable. When such a new strain emerges, implementing general public health measures to control its spread will play an important role in reducing serious illness and death and in minimizing disruption in our communities.

How people can protect themselves

The influenza virus spreads through droplets that have been coughed or sneezed into the air by someone who has the flu. You can get the flu by breathing in these droplets through your nose or mouth, or by the droplets landing directly on your eyes. You can also contract the virus by shaking hands with infected people or by touching contaminated surfaces then transferring the virus to your own eyes, nose or mouth.

By following good hand and respiratory hygiene practices, you can reduce the risk of catching or spreading influenza both during the regular flu season and in a pandemic:

- Wash your hands regularly with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds, especially before and after eating, after going to the bathroom, after coughing and sneezing and after touching surfaces that may have been contaminated.
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve to avoid spreading the virus through infected droplets or contaminating your hands with the virus.
- Throw away used tissues promptly.
- Frequently clean and then disinfect household surfaces such as door handles and light switches that may have been contaminated.
- Encourage all members of your household, especially children, to follow these practices.
- If you do get the flu, stay at home and rest until you are feeling better.

Community-based measures

Health professionals, including doctors and nurses, are educating Canadians on the importance of these good hygiene practices both before and during an influenza pandemic.

Immunization (vaccination) will be one of the most effective methods of protecting individuals from the pandemic influenza virus strain. A vaccine provides immunity by stimulating the body to produce antibodies to fight off different virus strains. However, a vaccine for pandemic influenza cannot be produced until the pandemic strain emerges. Once this strain has emerged and been identified, it will take about six months to develop and produce a vaccine. Therefore, a vaccine will not be available at the start of a pandemic and may be in short supply during the initial stages of the outbreak.

Public health authorities may also consider implementing additional measures in their communities to control the spread of influenza. For example, in certain situations they might:

- recommend that people with symptoms of illness stay at home, away from public events and locations (i.e. self-isolate themselves);
- close schools and daycare centres; and
- restrict indoor public gatherings.

The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan is a document developed by federal, provincial and territorial governments that maps out how Canada will prepare for and respond to a pandemic influenza outbreak. It includes guidelines that public health authorities can use in their planning strategies to control the spread of an influenza pandemic in their communities. These guidelines will need to be updated and revised as new research on the effectiveness and feasibility of various public health measures becomes available.

**For more information,
visit www.pandemicinfluenza.gc.ca**