

# Influenza

## Information for patients and families

---

### What is influenza or the flu?

Influenza is a respiratory illness which can affect the nose, throat and lungs. It is commonly called the flu. The flu can be caused by different types of influenza viruses.

The flu occurs during the winter months usually between November to April. If you get the flu you may have:

- a cough
- a sudden fever
- the chills
- a sore throat
- muscle aches and pains
- a headache
- a tired or weak feeling

Most people who get the flu will feel ill for about 5 to 7 days. Some people get sicker and may need to go to the doctor's office or emergency room. The flu can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization and death. The elderly and those with chronic medical conditions such as heart or lung problems can become quite sick when they get the flu.

### How does the flu spread?

The flu can spread easily from person to person by coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread by wiping your nose, mouth or eyes after touching a contaminated surface or shaking a person's hand.

You may feel sick from the flu 1 to 4 days after you are infected. Adults can spread the flu to others from the day before they get sick and up to 5 to 7 days after their flu symptoms start. Children can spread the flu for more than 7 days after they start feeling sick.

## What can I do to prevent the flu?

- Get the flu shot.
- Always clean your hands before touching your face, before eating meals and after using the toilet.
- When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, then throw the tissue out. Cough into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Follow hospital Additional Precautions posted on the door when entering the room of a patient who has the flu or there is reason to think the patient has the flu.

## What should I do if I get the flu?

- Rest, drink plenty of fluids and take medication such as Ibuprofen and acetaminophen to lessen the fever and body aches.
- Children and teens should not take aspirin or salicylates.
- Antiviral medication such as Tamiflu and/or Relenza may reduce the severity of illness if started within 48 hours of getting sick.
- Contact your family doctor for advice if your symptoms get worse.
- **Visitors** should not come to the hospital when they are sick.

## For more information about the flu

[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch) - This is the Public Health Agency of Canada website. You can look into immunizations and the Fluwatch reports.

Immunize Canada-Influenza

<http://immunize.ca/en/diseases-vaccines/influenza.aspx>

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.  
Clean your hands.**

