

Caring for People with Symptoms of Influenza

October 22, 2009

Symptoms of influenza are listed on the back in **Box A**

Instructions for the person with symptoms of influenza:

- Stay home until your fever has been gone for 24 hours and you are feeling better and are fully able to go back to your normal activities. You may still have a cough for several days to weeks, but you can return to school or work even if you are still coughing as long as you are otherwise better. Health care workers should ensure they are better for at least 24 hours and their cough is only mild. Medical notes are not needed in order to return to work, school or child care centres.
- Avoid contact with the rest of the family as much as possible. Ensure you have your own towel in the bathroom. If you need to be close to others, consider wearing a surgical mask.
- Cough into a tissue or your sleeve. Discard tissue right away and wash your hands.
- Wash hands frequently using warm water and pump soap or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Do not share anything that goes in your mouth.
- Try to avoid having visitors in the house.
- See **Box B** on the back of this sheet for specific instructions to help you feel better.
- See **Boxes C and D** on the back of this sheet regarding when to seek medical care.
- If you need to leave the house for a medical appointment, try to minimize direct contact with others as much as possible and consider wearing a surgical mask.
- Follow the advice of your health care provider. You can also call Telehealth Ontario for advice (1-866-797-0000).

Instructions for caregivers:

- If possible, choose only one family member to care for a sick person. Pregnant women and people with medical problems may want to avoid providing direct care if possible.
- Try to maintain a distance of at least six (6) feet (two metres) between you and the sick person whenever possible.
- When holding a small child who is sick, place their chin on your shoulder so they do not cough in your face.
- Wash your hands frequently with warm water and pump soap or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for the sick person.
- Perform extra cleaning in frequently touched areas of the house (table tops, keyboards, door knobs, remote controls, telephones, light switches, etc). Dishwashing and laundry can be done as usual.

Instructions for all household contacts:

- Watch for symptoms that include: fever, cough, sore throat, sore muscles, joint pain, weakness, tiredness, headache and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.
- Follow the instructions on this sheet if you become ill.

Seek health care if the sick person:

- Has underlying medical problems, is pregnant or had a baby in the past month, is very overweight, is under five (5) years of age or is 65 years of age or older.
- See **Box C** on the back for more details;

Seek emergency care if the sick person has symptoms of worsening illness:

- See **Box D** on the back for details.

For additional information, please contact the Middlesex-London Health Unit at 519-663-5317, ext. 2330 or visit our website at www.healthunit.com/h1n1info.

www.healthunit.com

BOX A

SYMPTOMS OF INFLUENZA

- Sudden onset of fever, chills or shakes
Sometimes not present, particularly in those less than 5 years of age or 65 years of age and over.
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Sore muscles and joints
- Tiredness
- Diarrhea and vomiting may occur, particularly in children

BOX B

INSTRUCTIONS TO HELP YOU FEEL BETTER

- Rest
- Drink lots of fluids
- Treat fever with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®)
- Do not give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) to children or teenagers under the age of 18 or pregnant women
- Pregnant women should treat their fever with acetaminophen
- Gargle with a glass of warm water or suck on hard candy or lozenges
- Use saline drops or spray for a stuffy nose
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco and caffeine
- Stay home until your fever has been gone for 24 hours and you are feeling better. You can return if you are still coughing. Health care workers should ensure they are better for at least 24 hours and their cough is only mild. Medical notes are not needed in order to return to work, school or child care centres.

Contact Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 if you have any questions.

BOX C

PEOPLE AT HIGHER RISK FOR COMPLICATIONS

You are at higher risk for complications if you are:

- less than 5 years of age
- 65 years of age and over
- pregnant or had a baby in the past 4 weeks
- very overweight

Or, if you have medical conditions including:

- lung problems, including asthma
- heart problems
- diabetes
- cancer
- problems with your immune system caused by disease or medications, including HIV
- kidney disease
- problems with your blood, such as anemia
- neurologic problems
- less than 18 years of age and taking daily aspirin

If you are at higher risk for complications, consult your health care provider as soon as symptoms develop. If you have no health care provider, go to a walk-in clinic.

Your health care provider may recommend an antiviral drug to help you feel better sooner and prevent complications.

Inform your health care provider that you have symptoms of influenza before or as soon as you arrive so that proper precautions can be taken to prevent spread to others.

BOX D

WORSENING ILLNESS

Symptoms of worsening illness include:

- Difficult or fast breathing or feeling short of breath
- Chest pain
- Purple or blue discolouration of the lips
- Vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- Signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, dry mouth and/or decreased peeing
- Confusion, disorientation, seizures, difficulty waking
- Stiff neck or sensitive to light
- Fever that does not go away or comes back after four (4) to five (5) days

In children also watch for:

- Any fever in a baby less than 3 months of age
- Very cranky or irritable

What to do:

- Go to the nearest emergency department.
- If symptoms are severe, call 911.
- Inform the emergency department and/or ambulance attendants that you have symptoms of influenza so that proper precautions can be taken to prevent spread to others.