

Protect Yourself Against the Flu

This resource is brought to you by Ontario's Doctors



The flu is highly contagious and is spread when people come into contact with those who have the flu, or touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their faces. Children, seniors and people living with chronic disease are more vulnerable to the flu and are at a greater risk of hospitalisation, serious illness and even death. In order to protect the most susceptible, it's important to take the necessary steps to prevent the spread of the flu.

Ontario's Doctors advise everyone to get a flu shot, stay home when sick, and not go to the doctor's office for a sick note. We can limit the spread of the flu, and keep ourselves and those around us healthy by washing our hands often.

WHAT IS THE FLU?

The flu is a nose, throat and lung infection caused by the influenza A or B viruses.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF THE FLU, AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM A COLD?

The cold and flu can have similar symptoms, but the flu is more severe. A cold will infect your nose and throat, but the flu can also impact your lungs. The flu can be marked by a fever (39 degrees and higher), cough, aching muscles, chills, sweats, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue and more debilitating symptoms than you'd generally have with a cold. The flu is not just a runny nose or sore throat; if you have it you will likely feel miserable and probably won't want to get out of bed. People with the flu can develop secondary infections like pneumonia.

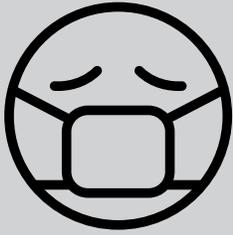
HOW DO WE CATCH THE FLU? WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR BODIES WHEN WE HAVE IT?

The flu spreads easily from person to person. We catch the flu by coming into contact with other people who have the virus, through the air or by physical contact. Infected individuals spread tiny droplets containing the flu virus when they sneeze, cough or talk. These droplets can land on someone or common surfaces. The virus can live on surfaces (like a doorknob, telephone or remote control) and then be transferred from your hands to your mouth, nose or eyes. Flu symptoms are the result of our body fighting off the virus – we produce more mucus, we cough, we can develop a fever, or even feel nauseated. All of this is a side-effect of our immune systems ramping up to kick the virus out of our bodies.

WHEN DOES THE FLU BECOME SERIOUS ENOUGH TO SEE A DOCTOR?

The flu rarely calls for a trip to the doctor. It's best to stay home, and let it run its course. In most cases the flu will take care of itself without medication. That said, if you feel like your illness is becoming worse, or you suffer from a pre-existing condition that has caused complications in the past, you should speak to your doctor. Most people will recover from the flu within seven to ten days of developing symptoms. See a doctor if you have a fever (39 degrees and above) that lasts for more than three days, develop shortness of breath, experience fast or troubled breathing, chest pain, grey or blueish skin colour, sudden dizziness or confusion, blood or coloured mucous in your spit or mouth, or ongoing vomit-

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The flu can spread easily
between people

Regularly clean and
disinfect common
surfaces

Cough and sneeze into
the bend of your arm

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ing. You can call your doctor ahead of time to let them know your symptoms so that they can arrange to see you without exposing other patients to the virus. With respect to going to the hospital, the Emergency Department is for urgent care. If you feel that you are in an emergency situation - for instance, if you are having problems breathing or have a persistent and very high fever - then you should absolutely take that step, but in general the flu does not need this kind of emergency care.

SHOULD WE BE TAKING OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS, OR IS REST AND FLUIDS GOOD ENOUGH?

The first thing to know is that antibiotics are never needed for the flu. The flu is a virus and antibiotics are for bacterial infections. Unless a person has pneumonia or some other bacterial infection, the flu will run its course and go away without needing a prescription. Mild flu symptoms can be treated with rest; fluids and over-the-counter medications can help with flu symptoms, like a fever or cough. It is important to know that over-the-counter cough and flu medications should not be given to children under the age of 6, unless advised by a physician.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS FROM GETTING THE FLU?

One of the best ways to protect yourself, your loved ones, and others from getting the flu is to get a flu shot every year. Getting the flu shot protects you if you are exposed to the virus and prevents you from passing the virus to others. The flu shot is safe for children 6 months and older. Some other ways to stay healthy and prevent the spread of the flu include:

- Wash your hands with soap frequently and thoroughly, especially before eating.
- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available to wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect common surfaces that a lot of people touch.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.
- Cough and sneeze into your upper sleeve or bend of your arm, not into your hand.

WHO SHOULD GET THE FLU SHOT?

Everyone who is 6 months or older should get the flu shot. This is especially important for people who are vulnerable to developing flu-related complications like pneumonia. Pre-existing conditions that can make someone more likely to get flu-related complications include: heart or lung disease, diabetes or cancer. It is also important for people who are more likely to spread the flu to those who are at high risk or complications to get the flu shot.

If you have any questions about the flu or anything you've learned from this document, the OMA recommends that you speak with your doctor for further details.