

## INFLUENZA (FLU) – WHAT YOU CAN DO?

Every year, many people get sick with influenza. In Canada, people usually get the influenza between November to April each year. Influenza is a very contagious and serious disease. Influenza virus infects the nose, throat and lungs; and can cause such complications as ear infection, pneumonia and even death.

### Your Risk

Influenza spreads in different ways - it can be through coughing, sneezing and on the hands of people with influenza disease on surfaces they have touched. Those who are 65 years of age and older or those with a medical condition such as lung, heart or kidney disease, diabetes or a weak immune system are at a higher risk of getting complications from the disease. Children ages 0 to 23 months old, all pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers are at an increased risk of being hospitalized with influenza.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of influenza include:

- \* Sudden fever of 38° C (100.4°F) or higher
- \* Pains and aches especially in head, lower back and legs
- \* Dry cough
- \* Weakness and fatigue

Other symptoms include:

- \* Chills
- \* Runny nose
- \* Sore throat
- \* No appetite

### How can you protect yourself and others from influenza?

#### Get the influenza vaccine

Influenza vaccination helps protect people from the influenza. Ideally, you should try to get the vaccine every fall between October to mid November but it's never too late, you can still get vaccinated till the end of the influenza season. As the virus strains change each year, an influenza vaccination is needed every year. Protection develops two weeks after getting vaccinated and lasts for about six to twelve months. Influenza vaccination prevents illness in 70 – 90 per cent of healthy children and adults. You may still get influenza after you getting vaccinated, but the symptoms will be a lot milder.

In Alberta, influenza vaccine is given FREE to:

- Those who are 65 years of age and older
- Those with a medical condition such as asthma, heart problems, diabetes, kidney disease and those with a weak immune system
- All children aged 6 - 23 months
- Pregnant women and breast feeding mothers
- Household members of the above groups and families with children between 0 – 23 months can also get a free vaccination
- Health care workers

Healthy people are encouraged to receive the vaccine even if they are not in the free groups. You can call your doctor's office to make an appointment or by calling Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) to find out about vaccine clinics.

**Wash your hands :** Help protect yourself and other people by washing your hands often so that you lower the risk of becoming infected after touching contaminated surfaces. Teach children to wash their hands too.

**Cover your cough:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the garbage. If you don't have a tissue, cough into your sleeve - don't cough into your hands, as you can contaminate surfaces with your germs.

**Stay well:** Exercise helps your body fight influenza viruses. Strive for 30 minutes of exercise most days. Drink plenty of water, try not to smoke and eat nutritious food to keep yourself healthy.

Source: Healthlink, Calgary Health Region