

Influenza (The flu)

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Overview

Right now, many people in Ontario have the flu. Flu season typically runs from November to April.

How does the flu spread?

The flu is a common respiratory virus that affects the lungs and throat.

The flu spreads easily, especially indoors. It spreads when someone with the virus breathes, talks, coughs, or sneezes. Droplets from the infected person can then land in the mouth or nose of others or can be breathed into a person's lungs.

You can also get the flu if you touch a surface with the flu virus on it and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

The virus can stay in the air or on a surface for minutes to hours.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

If you get the flu, you may develop a fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

You may also feel tired, get the chills, a sore throat, runny nose, headache, or muscle aches. Some people with the flu can also get diarrhea or vomiting.

Symptoms can range from mild to severe.

Who is most at risk?

While anyone can get sick from the flu, some people are more likely to develop serious illness. This includes babies and young children, seniors, people in long-term care homes, people who are pregnant, and people with underlying health conditions.

The flu can worsen chronic conditions like asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or congestive heart failure.

Influenza A (The Flu)



When should you seek medical attention?

If you or someone you're caring for develops severe symptoms, such as shortness of breath or chest pain, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Most people with the flu can recover at home, but some symptoms mean you need help right away.

You should go to an emergency department if you are having trouble breathing or start wheezing, if you become very pale or your lips turn white or blue, become very sleepy/difficult to wake, get a fever that stays high and won't go down, experience repeated vomiting and are unable to keep any liquids down, develop signs of dehydration with dry mouth or no urination or if you get vomiting or diarrhea with a large amount of blood in it.

How can you treat the flu?

If you are immunocompromised or at high risk of severe complications from the flu, you should speak with a healthcare provider or participating pharmacist as testing and treatment options may be available.

How can you help to protect others from getting the flu?

The flu shot is an effective, safe way to protect against severe illness from the flu. It is recommended for anyone aged six months and older and is available at participating pharmacies and through primary care offices.

You can also help to prevent the spread of the flu by staying home when sick, washing your hands often for at least 15 seconds or using hand sanitizer, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces, and wearing a tight-fitting, well-constructed mask if visiting a healthcare facility.