

November 2006

## Influenza

### **What is the flu?**

Influenza, the flu, is caused by a specific virus that typically comes around each fall or winter. People who get the flu usually have an abrupt onset of fever, muscle aches, headache, sore throat, cough, and weakness, usually lasting two to seven days. The cough and weakness can last for up to six weeks making physical activity and even day to day tasks difficult.

### **Who's at risk?**

Everyone is at risk of getting the flu. Each year, on average, 25% of Canadians get the flu. Most people who get the flu will not get seriously ill. However, the elderly, very young children (less than two years of age), individuals with some underlying medical conditions (for example, chronic bronchitis, diabetes or chronic heart disease) and people who have trouble clearing their nose and throat of secretions due to weakness or underlying illness can become very ill from complications associated with getting the flu. The flu can also make it easier to become ill with other health problems such as pneumonia, or to worsen symptoms of heart and lung disease. Complications from influenza can sometimes lead to death, usually in those who are older and/or frail. Very infrequently it can cause Reye's syndrome, an illness in children that can affect the liver and kidneys.

### **How is the flu spread?**

The flu spreads very easily from an infected person to others through coughing and sneezing. It is also spread by touching contaminated surfaces or objects such as unwashed hands, clothes, toys, eating utensils, surfaces (doorknobs, elevator buttons etc.) after someone with the flu has touched them.

### **What is the flu shot and what does it do?**

The influenza vaccine (flu shot) is made from particles of killed flu viruses. It contains three different types of influenza viruses (two types of influenza A and one of influenza B). A person who receives the flu shot develops immunity for the types of flu in the vaccine. The body needs about two weeks to build up protection to the virus, and this protection may last four months or longer.

### **Why do I have to get the flu shot every year?**

The influenza virus changes each year, so a different vaccine has to be used each year too. The protection from the vaccine wears off after about six months so people need a new shot every year. Doctors and scientists around the world determine the strains of influenza virus that are circulating, and the vaccine is then prepared to protect against the types that are most likely to occur each year.

### **When should I get the shot?**

The best time to get your shot is between October and mid-November every fall. Since peak flu activity in Toronto usually occurs between December and March, getting your flu shot after November will still help protect you against the flu. Children under the age of nine who have never been vaccinated for the flu need two shots, one month apart, to get the best protection. The cost of the flu shot is covered by the government. After you receive any immunization, make sure the provider updates your personal immunization record, such as the "yellow card". Keep the card in a safe place.

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## **Can anyone get the flu shot?**

Everyone six months of age or older, including breastfeeding and pregnant women, can get a shot. There are some exceptions:

- People who are allergic to eggs, thimerosal, neomycin or gelatin should **not** receive the vaccine.
- If you have had a reaction to a flu shot in the past, consult with your physician before getting this year's shot.
- Anyone with fever should wait until they are completely recovered before receiving their shot.
- Anyone with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome after receiving the flu shot should not receive a shot.

## **Is the flu shot safe?**

The flu shot is very safe. People may have some pain at the spot where they got their needle that can last up to two days. Some people may get muscle aches, a low-grade fever or feel tired for a day or two after getting the shot. The vaccine cannot give you the flu because it does not contain live flu virus.

A small number of individuals experience runny, watery eyes, some mild throat swelling, cough, wheeze and chest tightness within a day of receiving the flu shot. All individuals with these symptoms recover completely, usually within 48 hours, and have no further adverse consequences but a small number can require hospitalization. If you experienced symptoms of red watery eyes, cough, sore throat, wheeze and chest tightness immediately after having the flu shot in the past you should tell your doctor before getting this year's flu shot or tell the nurse at the clinic when you get this year's shot. In very rare instances the influenza vaccine has been associated with a temporary neurological condition called Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS). GBS occurs at about one case per million doses of vaccine given.

## **Should I ever call my doctor after getting a shot?**

If you experience any of the following symptoms after getting the flu shot you should seek immediate medical attention:

- hives
- swelling of the face, mouth or throat
- trouble breathing, hoarseness or wheezing
- paleness, weakness, a fast heartbeat or dizziness
- watery, runny, red eyes
- chest tightness
- any other unusual condition or serious reaction to the vaccine

If you experience watery, red eyes and chest tightness after having the flu shot please contact your Public Health office. In Toronto, residents can call 416-392-1250.

## **What if I get the flu anyway?**

Go to bed and get plenty of rest. Drink lots of water and juice. Stay away from children, elderly people or anyone with a serious illness, so they don't catch the flu from you. Ask your doctor about medication to reduce aches, pain and fever (e.g. acetaminophen or ibuprofen). If caught early, your doctor may be able to prescribe some anti-influenza drugs that may ease your discomfort and shorten the length of your illness. If you have trouble breathing or start to cough up thick yellow sputum, you should also see a doctor. Although antibiotics don't help influenza itself, sometimes doctors prescribe antibiotics for complications of flu such as pneumonia.

April 30, 2009 (p.m.)

## Human Swine Flu

Toronto Public Health is working with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Public Health Agency of Canada to monitor for human swine flu, and to implement actions to reduce its transmission.

**If you have been to Mexico and are experiencing flu-like symptoms:**

Stay home. Distance yourself from others around you. If you are sick enough to require medical attention, call your doctor. Tell them that you are sick and have travelled to Mexico in the last 7 days. Most cases of human swine flu in Canada and the U.S. have been mild, and people recover fully at home without the need for medical care.

**If you have been to Mexico and are well:**

Continue with your normal daily routines - there is no need to stay home. Watch for symptoms of flu. Please do not seek medical attention if you are feeling well.

**If you have general questions about swine flu,** call [TeleHealth Ontario](http://www.telehealth.on.ca) at 1-866-797-0000.

**If you are a healthcare provider** and have questions about patient care and swine flu, call 1-866-212-2272 or go to <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/ihn.html>.

**If you are looking for travel advice,** go to <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php>.

### What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a variant of normal seasonal influenza that contains bits of viruses from birds, pigs and humans. People with swine flu experience many of the same symptoms as with regular seasonal flu:

Headache	Weakness/fatigue
Cough	Nausea
Muscle aches	Vomiting
Sore throat	Diarrhea
Fever	Chills

### How is swine flu spread?

We are still investigating how swine flu is transmitted but it is likely spread from person to person via the respiratory route, the same as seasonal influenza. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Influenza can be passed to others up to 24 hours before illness starts. It appears that swine flu can be spread for up to 7 days after illness starts. Children may spread the virus for longer periods. Initial investigation shows that the incubation period of the human swine influenza is between two and seven days.

### **How can I avoid getting human swine flu?**

You can decrease your risk of getting swine flu, and any other type of influenza, by following these basic precautions:

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly or use an alcohol-hand sanitizer
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm, not in your hands
- Stay home if you are ill

### **How severe is the human swine flu?**

The majority of cases of swine flu reported in Canada and the United States have been mild. Some of the cases reported in Mexico have been more severe, involving primarily healthy young people who rapidly progressed from mild illness to severe respiratory distress. Some illnesses have resulted in death. The Public Health Agency of Canada has been working with the WHO, Mexican and American health officials to determine why cases in Mexico appear to be more severe.

### **Is there a treatment for swine flu?**

It appears that Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamavir) work to combat swine flu, so these drugs can be used to treat severe swine flu cases if treatment is started within two days of symptom onset. Mild illness that appears to be going away on its own does not require treatment. Swine flu is resistant to amantadine.

### **Is there a vaccine for swine flu?**

There is currently no vaccine available for swine flu. Canada has a contract with a vaccine manufacturer for vaccine production in the event of a pandemic. Once the pandemic strain has been confirmed, it may take up to six months for an effective vaccine to be developed and tested. The contract covers the production of enough pandemic vaccine for all Canadians.

### **Can I get swine flu from eating pork?**

No. Cooking destroys the virus.

### **Should I travel to Mexico or one of the other affected areas?**

The Federal government through Public Health Agency of Canada and Foreign Affairs is responsible for issuing travel advice to Canadians. Travel advisories can be found at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php>.

### **What should I do if someone I know is coming to Canada from Mexico?**

There are no restrictions for individuals travelling from Mexico. If someone coming from Mexico becomes ill in Canada with mild symptoms of swine flu, they should stay home. If symptoms requires medical attention, be sure to call ahead to discuss the symptoms and travel history.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- Toronto Public Health is providing ongoing updates at [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health).
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care <http://www.health.gov.on.ca>
- Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>  
PHAC's toll-free information number: 1-800-454-8302
- World Health Organization <http://www.who.int>

November 2006

## **Stop the Spread of Germs: Always Cover Your Cough**

### **Why should I cover my mouth and nose with a tissue when I cough or sneeze?**

Germs such as influenza, cold viruses, and even whooping cough are spread by coughing or sneezing. When you cough or sneeze on your hands, your hands carry and spread these germs. When you touch an object such as a door handle, subway pole, telephone or computer keyboard with unclean hands, you are spreading germs. The next person who touches these objects may pick up germs and get sick if they do not clean their hands before touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

### **How do I stop the spread of germs if I am sick?**

To stop the spread of germs:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put used tissues in the garbage. Clean your hands with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper arm, not into your hands.
- Keep your distance (more than 1 metre / 3 feet) from people.
- Stay at home if you are sick.
- Don't share eating utensils (e.g., cups or straws), toothbrushes or towels.

### **How can I stay healthy?**

- Keep your hands clean. Clean your hands with soap and warm water. When hands are not visibly soiled, you can use a minimum 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Minimize touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when you touch something that is contaminated with germs and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands.
- Keep your distance (more than 1 meter / 3 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing.
- Get your flu shot (influenza vaccine) every year.
- Practice good health habits - eat healthy foods, get regular exercise, and get enough rest.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Call Toronto Health Connection: 416-338-7600; TTY: 416-392-0658; or visit our website at [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health).

November 2006

## Stop the Spread of Germs: Keep Your Hands Clean

### Why is it important to keep hands clean?

Hands carry and spread germs. Touching your eyes, nose or mouth without first cleaning your hands may let germs into your body. Germs can also spread if a person sneezes or coughs into their hands and then touches an object such as a door handle, subway pole or telephone. The next person who touches these objects may pick up germs and get sick if they do not clean their hands before touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

### When should I wash my hands with soap and water?

When hands are visibly dirty.

After:

- sneezing, coughing, blowing your nose
- using the washroom
- handling garbage
- changing diapers
- handling raw foods

Before and after:

- preparing and eating food.
- touching a cut or open sore.
- touching eyes, nose or mouth.

### What's the best way to wash hands with soap and water?

Wet hands with warm water and apply soap.

Rub hands together vigorously for 15 seconds.

Scrub entire hand, including back of hands, between fingers and under nails.

Rinse well and dry hands with a towel (in public washrooms use single-use towels) or blow dryer.

Use towel to turn off water taps, if necessary.

### When can I use hand sanitizers instead of soap and water?

Hand sanitizers are very useful when soap and water are not available. If your hands are not visibly dirty, then alcohol-based (minimum 60%) hand sanitizers, gels or rinses will reduce germs. If hands are visibly dirty, wash with soap and water. People who are preparing food should wash their hands using soap and water rather than using hand sanitizers.

### How do I use a hand sanitizer?

Choose a sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Apply a small amount and rub hands together, spreading the sanitizer over the hands to include fingertips and under fingernails. Rub hands together for at least 15 seconds until the gel feels dry.

### Is hand sanitizer safe for children?

Yes. Young children should be supervised to make sure the sanitizer is used properly.

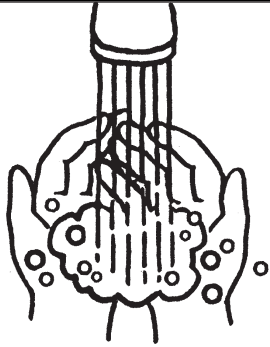
### Should I use hand lotion after cleaning my hands?

Yes. Dry skin is not uncommon when you clean your hands often, especially during the winter. Dry skin can crack, which may provide an opening for germs to enter your body. To prevent dry skin, you may use soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with lotion already added or use lotion (water-based is preferred) after cleaning your hands.

### Where can I get more information?

Call Toronto Health Connection: 416-338-7600; TTY: 416-392-0658 or visit our website at [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health).

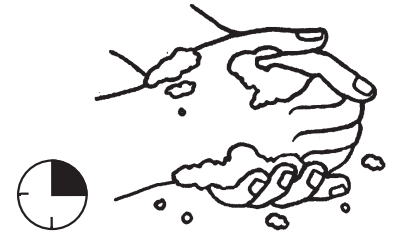
# Hand Washing



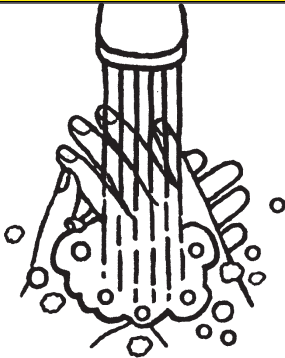
1. Wet hands.



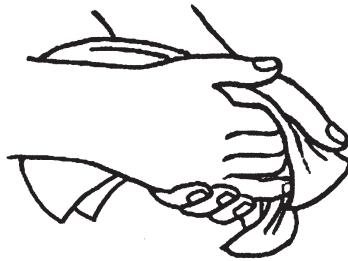
2. Apply soap.



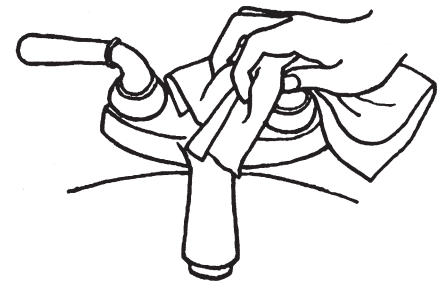
3. Lather for 15 seconds.  
Rub between fingers,  
back of hands,  
fingertips, under nails.



4. Rinse well under  
running water.



5. Dry hands well with  
paper towel or hot air  
blower.



6. Turn taps off with  
paper towel, if  
available.

## Stop the Spread of Germs

### Always Wash Your Hands

#### After you:

- Sneeze, cough or blow your nose
- Use the washroom or change diapers
- Handle garbage

#### Before and after you:

- Prepare or eat food
- Touch a cut or open sore

# Hand Sanitizing



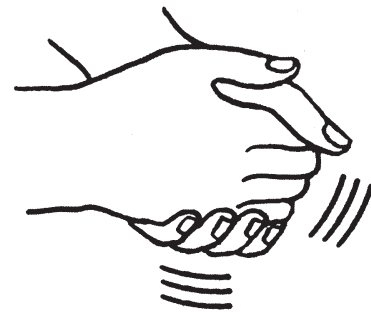
1. Apply sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol-based).



2. Rub hands together.



3. Work sanitizer between fingers, back of hands, fingertips, under nails.



4. Rub hands until dry.

## Stop the Spread of Germs

### Always Sanitize Your Hands

#### After you:

- Sneeze, cough or blow your nose
- Use the washroom or change diapers
- Handle garbage

#### Before and after you:

- Prepare or eat food
- Touch a cut or open sore

If hands are visibly dirty use soap and water