



## **INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL**

### **Seasonal Influenza Infection Patient Information**

#### **What is *Influenza*?**

*Seasonal Influenza*, commonly called “the flu”, is an illness affecting the lungs. It is caused by a virus that infects millions of Canadians. Unlike other cold viruses, such as the common cold, Influenza can cause severe illness and life threatening complications. Influenza (or “the flu”) is not a stomach illness or the common cold.

#### **How do people get *Influenza*?**

*Seasonal Influenza* is spread when a person coughs, sneezes or talks and the infected droplets are spread into the air. People with flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away. Another person who breathes in this air or has droplets land directly on the eyes, nose or mouth can catch the virus. Influenza virus can also be found on the hands of people who are sick with Influenza, and on the surfaces they touch. For example, the Influenza virus can survive on countertops for 24 to 48 hours.

#### **How does *Influenza* make people sick?**

The time from when a person is exposed to the virus to when symptoms begin is about 1 to 4 days, with an average of 2 days. Symptoms of Influenza almost always include a cough and fever. Other common symptoms include fatigue, aching, sore throat, headache, decreased appetite, and a runny or stuffy nose. Sometimes symptoms include nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Most people are sick from 7-10 days. Some people are at risk for more severe illness or complications: this includes young children, people over 65 years old, and pregnant women. As well, medical conditions (such as chronic lung, heart or kidney diseases, diabetes, or weak immune system due to cancer or HIV) make people more at risk for serious disease.

#### **How do I find out that I have *Influenza*?**

It is difficult to tell Influenza apart from other respiratory diseases without a test. Most people with flu symptoms do not require testing because the test results usually do not change how you are treated. The test may involve a healthcare provider swabbing the inside of your nose or the back of your throat.

### **How can I prevent or lessen my chances of getting *Influenza*?**

The most effective protection is to get the Influenza vaccine every year. The Influenza vaccine provides up to 70% protection within 2 weeks following vaccination and lasts at least 6 months. Because Influenza virus changes so quickly, yearly vaccination is needed.

Be sure to clean your hands regularly with soap and warm water or hand sanitizer, cough or sneeze into your arm or sleeve, clean shared spaces or items, and stay at home if you are ill.

If you get Influenza, increase the amount of fluids you drink and get plenty of rest. Antiviral drugs can effectively treat illness if they are taken within 48 hrs of the start of your symptoms. Antibiotics do not work to treat Influenza.

### **What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of *Influenza*?**

Hand washing is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of this virus. Be sure to clean your hands after using a tissue. Any patients with symptoms like Influenza are placed on isolation with staff wearing protective gear. Anyone who is ill should not visit patients. Every fall, the hospital promotes annual flu vaccine among staff.

### **What special precautions are needed for *Influenza* at home?**

Certain steps can help reduce the risk of spreading this virus to family members and other visitors. These include hand washing, regular cleaning of shared spaces, reducing shared items (e.g. linens, dishes), and not visiting public places if you are sick.

People with Influenza can infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than 7 days. Symptoms start 1 to 4 days after the virus enters the body. **That means that you may be able to pass on Influenza to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.** Some people can be infected with Influenza but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others.

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777.