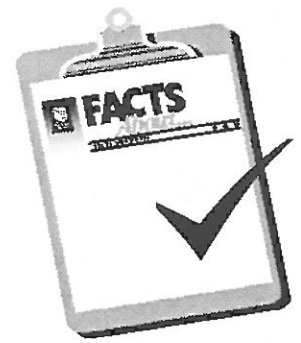




FACTS

About...



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

INFLUENZA

What is it?

Influenza (commonly known as “the flu”), is a serious, acute respiratory disease caused by a virus. People of any age can get influenza. Most people who get influenza are ill for 2-7 days. However, some people can become very sick, and need medical attention at a doctor's office or hospital. Influenza can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization, and even death, especially in the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions such as heart or lung problems. Children with influenza are at increased risk of developing pneumonia, bronchiolitis, ear infections, muscle inflammation and meningitis. Death is rare in healthy children but can occur, mainly in infants younger than one year of age.

- For more information, see *Facts About...Influenza Vaccine*

Influenza is a reportable disease and must be reported to the Health Department.

How is it spread?

Influenza spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing and talking. It is also spread through contact with unwashed hands, contaminated surfaces, or toys and eating utensils that have been contaminated with the influenza virus. Once infected, a person may spread the influenza virus to others before s/he develops symptoms and up to 5 days after the symptoms start, children up to 7 days. Because influenza is so common in children and they can spread the virus for a long time even after feeling well, children are considered an important source of community outbreaks.

What do I look for?

People who get influenza have a cough and fever. Children may have a dry cough and higher fever. Other symptoms often include chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. Influenza symptoms usually begin 1-3 days after being infected and last from 5-10 days. The cough and fatigue can persist for several weeks. Symptoms in babies may be very general including fussiness, runny or stuffy nose, irritability, and changes in feeding. Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur and are more common in children than adults.

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For more information
DURHAM REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT
905-668-7711 1-800-841-2729 or www.durham.ca

**Influenza is much
worse than a cold**

How is it treated?

Antibiotics have no effect against a viral illness like influenza but there are medications called antivirals which can be used for the early treatment of the flu. If your doctor prescribes them within 48 hours of the start of your symptoms, they may reduce the length of your illness by an average of 1 or 2 days. If you get the flu, you should stay home and increase the amount of fluids you drink (e.g., water, juice, soups) and rest you get (7-10 days) until you recover. Aches and fever can be treated with over the counter medication such as acetaminophen. Children should not be given acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) because of the risk of Reye Syndrome. Wait until you are feeling better before getting your flu shot.

How can I protect myself?

While healthy eating, adequate sleep and physical activity may help to maintain general good health, the most effective ways to protect yourself and others from the flu are to:

- Get vaccinated each year in the fall
 - See *Facts About...Influenza vaccine*
- Wash hands frequently and properly with soap and water or use waterless hand antiseptic gels when hands are not visibly dirty
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing by using a tissue, or raise your arm to your face to cough or sneeze into your sleeve and wash your hands afterwards
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth
- Keep shared surface areas clean and avoid sharing of items that may have become contaminated with the influenza virus (e.g., eating utensils, water bottles, etc.)
- If you get sick with influenza, stay at home

September 19, 2008