

MEDIA INFORMATION

Contact: Jane Fitcher, Director of Clinical Services, 345-5685
or Claire Farella, Public Health Nurse 345-5685

Pandemic Influenza

What is Pandemic Influenza?

Pandemic influenza occurs when a new influenza virus appears to which the human population has little or no immunity. This results in several, simultaneous epidemics world wide with enormous numbers of illnesses and deaths.

How does Pandemic Influenza Occur?

When all four of the following occur:

- A new influenza A virus is detected
- Human-to-human transmission happens easily
- The new virus causes serious clinical illness and death
- The population has little or no immunity to the virus

Ordinary Influenza	Pandemic Influenza
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs every winter between November and April • Peaks for few months during the winter and then declines • Affects 10% of population • Part of the population will have some immunity either because of previous exposure or they have been immunized with the annual flu vaccine. • Symptoms are unpleasant but most people do not become seriously ill or die • The very young, very old and people with certain chronic illnesses are most at risk • Can be prevented with annual vaccination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs 3 times a century (approx every 30 years), Spanish Flu 1918, Asian Flu 1957 and Hong Kong 1968. • Occur any time during the year • Occur in 2 to 3 waves several months apart, each wave lasting 6-8 weeks • May affect 25% of population • More serious infections and deaths will occur • People of every age may be at risk • No vaccine available at beginning of pandemic, will take approximately 6 months to develop • When available the whole population will be offered immunization • Antiviral medication may be used for treatment

How will the pandemic affect the community?

- There will be high levels of influenza in the general population, as it spreads rapidly and very few people will have immunity.
- The virus is spread **directly** when infected people cough or sneeze and droplets of their respiratory secretions come in contact with the mouth, nose and eyes of another person and **indirectly** when people touch surfaces, objects or hands of others that the virus is living on. The virus can live on hard surfaces for 24-48 hours, on cloth, paper and tissue for up to 8 hours and 5 minutes on hands.
- There will be increased pressure on health care services due to serious illness and death.
- Economic and social disruption will occur.

Are we prepared?

- Canadian government has prepared a Federal Pandemic Influenza Plan.
- Ontario government has prepared a Provincial Pandemic Influenza Plan.
- Tri-County of Leeds, Grenville and Lanark has prepared an influenza plan that links with both levels of government and with agencies within the community.
- Health care providers and community partners are being educated and trained in how to respond to a pandemic and cope with the demands that are likely to be placed on them.
- The Canadian government is taking steps to be in the best possible position for a vaccine to be manufactured as rapidly as possible.
- The federal and provincial government are building a stockpile of antiviral drugs that will be used in the most effective way to treat those most at risk of serious illness based on how the disease develops.

When pandemic influenza reaches Canada there will be announcements in the newspaper radio and television and advice will be given on the best course of action to take.

What can you do?

Some basic measures that you can take to reduce your risk of infection:

- The **most important measure is to practice hand hygiene; frequent hand washing** reduces the risk of picking the virus up from surfaces and passing it on to others.
- Practice cough etiquette such as covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Practice social distancing by avoiding large crowds of people whenever possible.
- When vaccine is available get immunized.

*Information obtained from Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan (2005),
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care