

Influenza

Information to help patients, families and visitors better understand influenza or “the flu”

Read this brochure to learn about:

- How the flu spreads
- What UHN does to protect you
- What you need to know about the flu shot
- Where to find more information



Please do not visit your loved one in the hospital if you have a fever, cough or other symptoms of the flu. A sick visitor can make patients and health care workers sick.



What is influenza or “the flu”?

Influenza is better known as “the flu”. It is caused by a virus. The types (or strains) of virus often change from year to year.

When people get the flu they may have:

- sore throat
- cough
- runny or stuffy nose
- sneezing
- fever
- muscle aches
- headache
- weakness
- fatigue

People usually get the flu during the fall and winter months. It will usually last from 5 to 7 days.

How does the flu spread?

The flu spreads from person to person in drops of mucous that leave the nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing. You can also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus on it, and then touching your own nose or mouth.

How can I prevent getting the flu, or giving it to my family and friends?

Washing your hands often is one of the best ways to stop the spread of the flu. You can clean your hands using hand sanitizer or soap and water.

It is important to wash your hands:

- ✓ before entering the hospital
- ✓ before entering a patient's room
- ✓ when leaving a patient's room
- ✓ after coughing or sneezing
- ✓ after touching surfaces in public areas

You can also stop the spread of the flu by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. The best way to do this is by coughing into your sleeve or into a tissue.

What if I have the flu and I am admitted as a patient at UHN?

If you get the flu and become a patient in our hospital, you may be moved to a single or semi-private room and kept away from other patients. Everyone who enters your room will wear a mask, eye protection, gown and gloves. We call this being on "droplet precautions".

Why am I kept away from others if I have the flu?

We do not want to spread the flu to anyone else. Keeping you in your own room and away from others lowers the chance that the flu is spread to other patients or health care workers.

How long will these special precautions last?

These precautions will last until your symptoms (such as coughing, fever) are gone and you are feeling better.

Getting the flu shot

To help stop the spread of the flu, you can get the flu shot.

Call your family doctor, local pharmacy, or any Toronto Public Health flu clinic to get the flu shot. Call the Immunization Information line at 416 392 1250 to find a clinic near you.

You may hear about the flu shot on the news. The flu shot is not perfect but it is still one of the best ways to help stop the spread of the flu.

Why do I need a shot every year?

The flu shot wears off after about 6 months.

At the same time, different strains of the flu happen every year. The shot you received last year may not protect you against new flu strains this year.

When is the best time to get the flu shot?

Flu season usually begins in October and lasts until early spring. October to mid-November is the best time to get your flu shot. Please remember to write down the day you received the flu shot in your personal immunization record.

Can I get the flu from the flu shot?

No. The flu shot is made from inactive flu virus, usually containing 3 different strains. After you get your shot, your body develops immunity in about 2 weeks to these strains of the flu virus.

Sometimes a new strain of the flu emerges while the vaccine is being made. You will not be immune to this new strain from your flu shot.

Sometimes people feel that they get sick after receiving the flu shot. Since the flu happens during the same seasons as the common cold, chances are you are getting sick from another illness. This does not mean the flu shot made you sick or gave you the flu.

Often, the area where you get the flu shot can feel sore and tender. You can take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) to help with any soreness.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions or concerns about stopping infections, ask your nurse to call Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC).



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