

# The flu virus

## At home with the flu



### Introduction

People who have the flu are often told to stay at home and rest. Unless the symptoms are severe or the patient has other medical problems, this is often the best and fastest way to get better. Here are some important points to remember when you are, or someone you live with is, at home with the flu.

#### What is the flu?

- The flu is an illness caused by the influenza virus.
- It is very contagious and can be spread easily between people.
- It usually lasts 7 to 10 days.
- It cannot be treated with antibiotics because it is not caused by bacteria.

#### What to expect with the flu?

- At the start: sudden fever (temperature over 38°C), headache, muscle pain and weakness, dry cough, sore throat and sometimes a stuffed nose.
- In the middle: fever and muscle aches decrease. Hoarse, dry or sore throat, cough and mild chest discomfort can become more noticeable. You may feel tired or depressed. Some people may have nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- Near the end: symptoms decrease. Cough, tiredness and other symptoms may last 7 to 14 days or more.

#### Caring for someone with flu symptoms

- Fever, aches, and pains may be treated with acetaminophen or ibuprofen (Tylenol® or Advil®). Follow the instructions on the bottle or the advice from your health centre. **Never give aspirin (ASA) to children.** Applying a cool face cloth to the face and neck or over the whole body can also help reduce fever.
- Try to have only one adult take care of the sick person – not a pregnant woman if possible.
- The sick person should not have visitors other than the caregiver. Visit by phone instead.

#### When should someone seek immediate medical help?

Watch for signs that the sick person may need further medical attention, including:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Blueness around the lips
- Inability to keep fluids down
- Becomes less alert or shows signs of mental confusion
- High fever that does not get better with treatment (Advil® / Tylenol®)

#### When caring for children, also watch for:

- High fever lasting more than 24 hours that does not get better with treatment (Advil® / Tylenol®)
- Difficulty waking-up, unusual quietness or does not respond
- Signs of dehydration, such as not having a wet diaper in 12 hours

If a person shows any of these signs, please CALL your community health centre immediately.

#### Keeping others safe

- Keep other people in the house away from the sick person.
- If possible, the sick person should sleep in a separate room.
- Wipe down surfaces such as bedside tables, bathroom surfaces and toys with household disinfectant every day.
- Keep the sick person's items like clothes, bedding and towels separate from the rest of the family's.
- Do not share eating utensils, food or drinks with the sick person.

