

PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

WHAT FAMILY PHYSICIANS SHOULD KNOW

Family physicians play a major role in planning for and managing pandemic influenza. It is estimated that **up to 35%** of the population, including your staff and patients, will become clinically ill in the event of pandemic influenza and 0.4% of the clinically ill could die. This document outlines important steps that you should follow to ensure that your practice is prepared for a pandemic outbreak both in terms of infection control and service continuity.

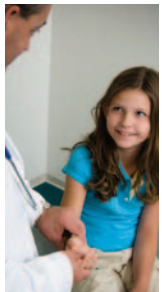


What should I do first?

Be sure your Public Health Office has your contact information so that you can be kept informed. Find your Public Health Office here: www.pandemic.cpha.ca.

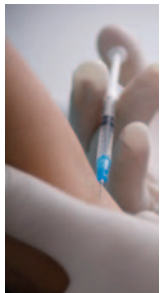
What should I do now to ensure good infection control measures?

- Hand hygiene is the most important infection control measure for health care providers, office staff, and patients. Contact your Public Health Office for hand hygiene posters.
- Use signs to identify and direct patients who may be infective. For example, have a sign that reads: "If you have a cough and fever, please tell the receptionist."
- If possible, organize your waiting room to separate patients with influenza-like symptoms.
- There is a lack of evidence that surgical masks prevented transmission of influenza during previous pandemics. However, in the early phase, it may be prudent to ask a coughing patient to wear a mask and for you to wear a mask when interacting in close face-to-face contact with a coughing patient. Contact your Public Health Office for up-to-date information on masks.
- Have a two-week supply of disinfecting and sterilizing agents in your office.
- Review your Public Health Office's information about influenza symptoms to watch for and how to report if you suspect a case.



What is the current information about the use of antivirals?

- For prophylaxis: The current recommendation that antivirals be used only for early treatment and not for prophylaxis is under review.
- For treatment: For maximum treatment efficacy, antivirals must be started within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.



What is the current information about vaccines?

- Advise all patients to get the seasonal flu vaccine and high-risk patients, such as the elderly, to get the pneumococcal vaccine.
- It will take about four to six months to develop a new vaccine against the pandemic influenza strain.
- Initially, vaccine batches will be given to priority population groups. The current priority groups are:
 1. Health care workers, public health responders and key health decision makers.
 2. Individuals essential to the response or maintaining of key community services.
 3. Persons at high risk of severe or fatal outcomes following influenza infection.
 4. Healthy adults (who do not qualify for inclusion in Group 1, 2 or 3).
 5. Children, 24 months to 18 years.
- Priority groups may be revised once epidemiologic data on the pandemic virus becomes available. Check with your Public Health Office for updated information.



What else can I do?

- Ask your Medical Officer of Health about your role during a pandemic influenza.

Sources: The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cpip-pclcpi/) and the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (www.ccohs.ca/pandemic/).



The College of
Family Physicians
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