

December 5, 2018

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Please be aware there is an increase in the number of schools reporting high rates of absenteeism due to illness over the past week. Reported symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, respiratory, and flu-like symptoms.

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit would like to inform you that there has been a higher number of infants and young children reported with influenza (the flu) this year.

The type of flu virus confirmed in the community (influenza A, H1N1) is more likely to affect children, with infants being most at risk. In response to this influenza activity, the Health Unit is reaching out to parents to encourage everyone, especially all children over the age of six months to get the flu shot. The best protection against this year's influenza virus is to get immunized.

If your child is sick, it is best to keep them home from school and visit a health care provider as needed. The Health Unit is working closely with the school community to ensure increased infection prevention and control measures are in place.

## Influenza (the flu): Just the Facts

### What is the flu?

Influenza (the flu) is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus.

### What are the symptoms of the flu?

After the virus enters the body, it can take 1-4 days before you may feel sick. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Stuffy and/or runny nose
- Sore throat
- Feeling unwell
- Tiredness
- For some children, nausea and vomiting may be present.



For some people, the virus may cause mild cold-like symptoms. However, for people, such as children and pregnant women, the virus can make them so sick that they need to go to the hospital. The flu can lead to pneumonia, fever-related seizures, encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), and/or ear infections in infants and young children. The flu and pneumonia is

one of the top 10 causes of death in Canada<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that, annually, an average of 12,200 hospitalizations and 3,500 deaths are related to influenza<sup>1</sup>.

### How is it spread?

The flu mostly spreads by breathing in contaminated air from an infected person who is sneezing, coughing, or speaking. You can also get infected by touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with your hands after touching contaminated hands, surfaces, or objects. The virus can live up to 24 to 48 hours on surfaces.

### How long is it contagious?

A person with the flu may be contagious the day before symptoms begins and up to 7 days after. Children and people with a weakened immune system may be contagious for even longer.

### How is the flu prevented?

For almost everyone 6 months of age or older, the best way to protect yourself is to get the flu vaccine early. It can take up to 2 weeks for the vaccine to work. You can get the vaccine from your health care provider or the pharmacy (for people older than 5 years of age).

Other ways to prevent the flu include:

- Washing your hands often for at least 15 seconds with warm water and soap. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth before you wash your hands.
- Practicing respiratory etiquette, such as coughing and/or sneezing into your elbow or tissue.
- Staying at home if sick.
- Not sharing any personal items, such as cups and water bottles.
- Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that are often touched by others (such as door knobs, phones).

### Can I get the flu vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Yes. The flu vaccine is considered safe and recommended for all pregnant women at all stages of pregnancy and mothers who are breastfeeding.

For more information, please visit our website, [www.wechu.org](http://www.wechu.org), or contact the Infectious Disease Prevention Helpline at 519-258-2146, extension 1420.

Respectfully,

Dr. Wajid Ahmed, MBBS, MAS, MSc, FRCPC  
Acting Medical Officer of Health

1 Government of Canada. (2018). *Canadian immunization guide chapter on influenza and statement on seasonal influenza vaccine, 2018-2019*. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2018-2019.html#2.7>

**LOWER  
YOUR  
FLU RISK**

