

INFLUENZA

You and Your Family

There was a lot of confusion about the flu season this year. This confusion led to concern and even panic. This year was a different influenza year in Ontario, requiring different phases of immunization. However, with a clear strategy and public vigilance the impact of this infection was minimized.

The Seasonal Flu – Each winter there are different respiratory viruses that can circulate. These viruses can cause “the flu” ~ Fever, chills, cough, runny nose, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, extreme weakness and fatigue, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. It can last two to seven days. The flu spreads by people coughing or sneezing droplets which are then breathed in by others or touched by others. If that person has not washed their hands, they will bring the virus into their body through their mouth. Some people can become very ill, possibly developing complications and requiring hospitalization.

Each year, the “regular” seasonal flu shot is formulated to help our bodies fight the predicted viruses for our area. The seasonal flu shot does not protect against H1N1.

H1N1 – This flu virus is world wide. It appears to be primarily a disease of the young. It does not come from eating pork. It causes symptoms similar to those of the seasonal flu. There is some evidence that this similar virus was in the world around 1957. Therefore, people who were living then may have some existing immunity to the H1N1 flu virus. Since it is not included in the seasonal vaccine which has been prepared for Ontario, the vaccine for H1N1 needs to be given in a separate shot. All of the people who were at the highest risk of getting each type of flu got the matching vaccine first.

Treatment – In most cases, H1N1 flu or Seasonal flu is not serious. If you begin to experience the symptoms of the flu, stay home from school or work until your fever has been gone for 24 hours and you are feeling better and are fully able to go back to your normal activities. Avoid contact with the rest of the family, use your own towel in the bathroom. Wash your hands frequently and wear a mask if you need to be close to others. Perform extra cleaning on frequently touched areas of the house. If you do not start to feel better after a few days or if your symptoms get worse, you should seek medical attention. Worsening illness could be shortness of breath, chest pain, blue lips, inability to keep liquids down, dehydration, confusion, or fever that does not go away or comes back after four or five days. If your symptoms have worsened to this point, you will need to attend at an emergency room or be taken by ambulance. Be sure to inform the staff that you have been sick with influenza that has worsened so that they can take the proper precautions.

Some people are at higher risk for complications as soon as they come down with the flu. There are higher risks if the person:

- Is less than five years of age, or
- Is 65 years of age or older, or
- Is pregnant or had a baby in the past four weeks, or
- Is very overweight or
- has underlying medical problems (lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, anemia, immune deficiency).

Telephone your healthcare provider as soon as symptoms develop in these people. The doctor or Nurse Practitioner may prescribe an antiviral drug called Tamiflu to help you feel better sooner and to prevent complications. You will be advised if they should come to the clinic or if the medication can be given without a visit. Tamiflu must be administered within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.

Again, there are directives that doctors and nurse practitioners must follow before tamiflu can be given.

To find out when you can receive your H1N1 vaccine or seasonal vaccine at Grand Bend Area CHC, please call 519-238-2362.