

## ***“Do I need to be seen today?”***

Let's Talk About...

### **Influenza (aka “the flu”)**

#### **What is influenza?**

Influenza, commonly known as “the flu,” is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus that can cause mild to severe illness and sometimes hospitalization. Symptoms commonly include: muscle or body aches, headache, chills, weakness, and fatigue. Some people will have cold-like symptoms (cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose). Fever lasting 2-5 days is also common, though not everyone with influenza will have a fever. Some people will also have vomiting or diarrhea. To treat symptoms of vomiting and diarrhea, see the “Vomiting and Diarrhea” pamphlet on our website.

#### **How does it spread?**

You can become infected by breathing droplets produced by an infected person’s sneeze or cough, or by touching a contaminated surface (e.g. door knobs, railings, countertops) or through direct contact with an infected person, and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

#### **Should I be seen in the office?**

*Most people with an influenza illness don't benefit from an office visit but are potentially infectious and dangerous to vulnerable staff and other patients. Like most viral infections, influenza does not respond to antibiotics.*

Please consider the following information before booking an appointment.

#### **How is it different from a cold?**



Both the flu and common cold are respiratory illnesses that present with similar symptoms and can often be difficult to tell apart. In general, the flu comes on quickly and is worse than a cold, can result in serious complications and can include: fever or feverish/chills, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue. If you are concerned you may have the flu, see the section “When to call the WCFHT” below, to determine whether you should seek medical care.

#### **What should I do if I get sick?**

If you get sick with flu-like symptoms, it is recommended that you stay home, except to seek medical care. Most people recover at home without medical care and get better in several days to less than two weeks. Avoid close contact with other people to prevent the spread of illness, especially young children and elderly people who are at a higher risk of developing serious complications from the flu.



Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Consider wearing a mask if you do need to leave the house, as you risk exposing other people to your illness.

### What can I do to feel better?

The majority of people will recover at home without any medical treatment. The following are strategies that may be used to help alleviate symptoms:

- ✓ Ibuprofen (brand name: Advil) or Naproxen (brand name: Aleve) as needed to relieve fever as well as discomfort from headache or muscle aches. Please consult your pharmacist prior to use if you take any other medications.
- ✓ Gargle with warm salt water a few times a day to alleviate sore throat
- ✓ Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke
- ✓ Drink plenty of fluids like water, fruit juice, and clear soups
- ✓ Do not drink alcohol

### How can I protect myself and others?



The most important step you can take in protecting yourself against flu viruses is to get the annual flu vaccine (flu shot or nasal-spray). Flu shots are recommended for everyone 6 months\* and older, including pregnant women and people with chronic health conditions. The flu shot is a safe and effective way to reduce flu illnesses, doctors' visits, missed work or school due to the flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalization and complications, such as pneumonia.

\*Children younger than 6 months of age are at high risk of serious flu illness, but too young to be vaccinated. Caretakers or those that live with the child should get vaccinated to protect the baby.

To avoid getting sick, avoid close contact with people who are already sick. Wash your hands often with soap and water and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with the flu.



### DID YOU KNOW...getting the flu shot may lower your risk of stroke or heart attack by as much as half?



Not only does the annual flu vaccine help protect you from serious complications of influenza, some people obtain the additional benefit of improved cardiovascular risk. Studies by the University of Toronto and University of British Columbia have found that getting the flu vaccine reduced the risk of adverse cardiovascular events (such as heart attack or stroke) by as much as 50% in people with heart disease. The flu shot not only helps prevent heart disease in vulnerable patients, it offers the best protection in the highest risk patients. You can think of the benefits of the flu shot as twofold: warding off complications of the flu and a yearly preventative therapy for patients with heart disease.

### When to call the WCFHT



Most people with the flu recover at home without medical care. However, if you or a person you care for are at a high risk of serious flu complications (see "High Risk Groups" below) OR have any of the following signs or symptoms, give us a call.

- ✓ Fever above 102°F (38.9°C)
- ✓ Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- ✓ Sudden dizziness
- ✓ Trouble breathing or short of breath
- ✓ Confusion
- ✓ Severe or persistent vomiting

In Children:

In addition to the above, call us for advice if your child has any of the following signs:

- ✓ Bluish skin
- ✓ Not drinking enough fluids
- ✓ Not waking up or not interacting
- ✓ Mental change (e.g. Sluggishness, Irritability)
- ✓ Fever with a rash
- ✓ Symptoms improve but return with a fever and worse cough

Infants:

In addition to the above, call us for advice if your infant has any of the following signs:

- ✓ Being unable to eat
- ✓ Has no tears when crying
- ✓ Significantly fewer wet diapers than normal

**High Risk Groups**

The following groups are at greater risk of serious flu-related complications. If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk, call us for advice.

- ✓ Children younger than 5
- ✓ Adults 65 years and older
- ✓ Pregnant women (and up to 2 weeks postpartum)

**People with:**

- ✓ Asthma
- ✓ Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions
- ✓ Chronic lung disease
- ✓ Heart disease
- ✓ Blood disorders
- ✓ Endocrine disorders (e.g. Diabetes)
- ✓ Kidney disorders
- ✓ Liver disorders
- ✓ Metabolic disorders
- ✓ Weakened immune systems (due to HIV, AIDS, cancer or those on chronic steroids)
- ✓ People younger than 19 receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- ✓ People with extreme obesity (BMI 40 or greater)

**If you do make an appointment...**

Please ensure you do the following:

- ✓ Wear a mask while visiting the office with an acute respiratory problem making sure it covers the nose and mouth - (provided at entrance to waiting room)
- ✓ Use alcohol gel to clean hands (provided at entrance)
- ✓ Sit at least one meter away from others (if negative pressure room is occupied)
- ✓ Otherwise, inform the receptionist that you are here and that you intend to enter the isolation room.

