

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IPAC CANADA RECOMMENDS ACTIONS TO AVOID FLU

Wednesday, January 8, 2014 (WINNIPEG) - Infection Prevention and Control Canada (IPAC Canada) reminds us that this year's influenza season has arrived with a vengeance.

Western provinces are seeing rapidly increasing rates of infection, both in the community and in healthcare settings. With the outbreak spreading eastward, other parts of the country can expect to be increasing rates of influenza over the coming weeks.

The main strain of influenza circulating at this time is H1N1, similar to the strain responsible for the 2009 influenza pandemic. The H1N1 strain hits certain members of our population particularly hard, including young children, pregnant women and people with chronic health conditions such as asthma. There are key things that you can do to stay healthy.

First and foremost, as IPAC Canada President Bruce Gamage explains, is to get a flu shot. "The influenza vaccine is the best defense against developing an influenza infection," he says. "The currently circulating strain of H1N1 is well matched with the vaccine strain. The vaccine is not 100% effective in preventing influenza infection, but if you've received the vaccine and develop an infection it is likely to be mild."

Canadians should be aware that it's not too late to get this year's vaccine, but supplies are running short in some areas of the country. IPAC recommends that one should consult their local pharmacy or family physician to ensure they have a good supply. Vaccine is provided free to children under 17, those over 65 and people with chronic health conditions.

As always, the influenza vaccine is provided to all healthcare providers by their employers. It is essential for all healthcare providers to be immunized to prevent them from transmitting the virus to those they care for.

IPAC Canada also notes the other key action you can take to avoid getting influenza is frequent hand hygiene. A common way for the influenza virus to enter your body is via our hands. When we touch a surface that is contaminated and then touch our face, eyes, nose or mouth, the virus can enter our body and cause infection. Frequent hand hygiene with soap and running water or alcohol-based hand rubs is very effective in removing viruses that we pick up from the environment on our hands. It is especially important to clean your hands before eating or handling food.

If you do become ill, take care not to spread the virus to others. Stay home when you are sick. Dragging yourself to work when you are sick is not doing yourself a favour, and is a good way to spread you germs to others – so stay home until you are feeling better. If you are coughing or sneezing make sure to cover up. Cough or sneeze into your upper arm or elbow or use a tissue. Remember to continue to clean your hands regularly, especially if you cough or sneeze into your hands. If you have a chronic health condition, seek advice from a healthcare provider on whether you should receive antiviral medication.

The key to staying healthy this influenza season is through following these simple but effective measures.

About IPAC Canada

IPAC Canada, formerly CHICA–Canada, is a national, multi-disciplinary, voluntary association of Infection Prevention and Control Professionals (ICPs) with 22 chapters across the country dedicated to the health of Canadians by promoting excellence in the practice of infection prevention and control. Visit IPAC Canada’s website (www.ipac-canada.org) for infection prevention and control information.

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