

## Influenza Information

### Primary school and children's services centre exclusion for influenza

Exclusion from school and childcare is recommended until symptoms resolve.

### Infectious agent of influenza

Influenza virus (types A, B and rarely C) is the causative agent.

### Identification of influenza

### **Clinical features**

Influenza is an acute respiratory disease. Symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- headache
- myalgia
- lethargy
- coryza
- sore throat

Most symptoms resolve within two to seven days, although the cough may persist for longer. Complications of influenza include middle-ear infections, secondary bacterial pneumonia, and exacerbation of underlying chronic health conditions.

Severe disease and complications occur primarily among the elderly and those debilitated by a chronic disease, including:

- diabetes
- cardiac disease
- chronic respiratory conditions

Other people at increased risk of severe disease include:

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people
- pregnant women
- children under five years of age

### Diagnosis

A clinical diagnosis can be confirmed by:

- detection of influenza virus is by (PCR) type swabs such as nasopharyngeal aspirate or nose and throat swabs, taken within five (preferably two) days of onset.
- serology performed on blood specimens taken during the acute and convalescent stages. However, this provides a retrospective diagnosis and is therefore less useful for clinical or outbreak management.

### Incubation period of influenza virus

The incubation period is one to four days, with an average of two days for seasonal influenza.

## Mode of transmission of influenza virus

Influenza viruses are most commonly spread by inhalation of infectious respiratory droplets produced by an infected person while talking, coughing, or sneezing.

Influenza can also be spread through touching surfaces where infected droplets have landed. Nasal inoculation after hand contamination with the virus is an important mode of transmission, highlighting the critical importance of hand hygiene.

## Period of communicability of influenza

Influenza is communicable for up to 24 hours prior to onset of symptoms, and up to seven days after onset of symptoms in adults and longer in children (up to 10 days).

## Control measures for influenza

### **Preventive measures**

Annual vaccination is the most important measure to prevent influenza and its complications.

The influenza vaccine in Australia is developed in time for the annual winter rise in influenza activity. The vaccine normally includes both Influenza A and B strains.

Vaccination is recommended for everyone from six months of age and is free for high-risk groups.

Additional measure to prevent the spread of influenza include:

- hand hygiene, surface cleaning and correct cough/sneeze etiquette
- use of face masks
- people with influenza-like illness (ILI) should limit use of, or avoid public transport and **self-exclude from school, childcare, work, or public gatherings**
- people with an ILI should not visit family or friends in high-risk settings such as residential care facilities or hospitals.

## Control of case

Individual cases are managed by their treating doctor. Symptomatic treatment is indicated alone or with the addition of antiviral medication (i.e., neuraminidase inhibitors).

Antiviral medication can reduce the severity and duration of influenza if taken soon after onset of symptoms.

**Measures such as hand hygiene, good respiratory and cough etiquette, use of face masks, voluntary home isolation and cleaning of commonly touched surfaces help reduce transmission of influenza.**

**Patients should be advised to avoid contact with people at high risk of developing severe influenza.**

Further information: [www.health.vic.gov.au/site-4/infectious-diseases/influenza](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/site-4/infectious-diseases/influenza)