



### Q What is influenza?

Influenza is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. Symptoms include fever, cough, headache, sore throat, and sore muscles and joints. Many people who say (or are told) that they have 'flu' in fact have a bad cold. Currently there are 3 different subtypes of influenza virus in circulation and these change slowly from one year to the next.

### Q What is avian (bird) flu?

Bird flu is caused by a flu virus adapted for birds, not humans. It therefore only rarely infects people and is not a worry unless you are in close contact with infected birds. The concern is that a bird flu virus, like the current H5N1 strain, MIGHT change into a new virus that people can catch and spread easily – a virus with pandemic potential. This has not happened to date.

### Q What is a pandemic of influenza?

This refers to the situation when a completely new type of influenza suddenly emerges in the human population and gives rise to major epidemics throughout the world because there is no immunity. This happened three times in the last century. The most severe was the 1918 pandemic when about 40 million people died. Most experts believe that future severe pandemics are inevitable at some stage.

### Q How does influenza spread?

Influenza is mostly caught by breathing in air containing the virus. The virus is passed into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Influenza is highly infectious and can spread rapidly from person to person. It can also be spread by touching infected surfaces.

### Q What can I do to prevent disease spreading?

Cough etiquette and hand hygiene are important for EVERYONE, especially in health care settings, AT ALL TIMES even when there is not a pandemic.

#### REMEMBER:

1. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
2. Immediately dispose of your used tissue in a waste bin.
3. Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing - wash with soap and water or disinfect with alcohol-based hand sanitiser to avoid contaminating surfaces.
4. Spitting also spreads germs.
5. If coughing or sneezing, stay away from others as much as possible.

WHERE POSSIBLE, WHEN 'FLU' IS ABOUT, PATIENTS IN HOSPITAL WITH RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTIONS SHOULD HAVE A SURGICAL MASK APPLIED TO PREVENT TRANSMISSION TO OTHERS. THIS CAN BE REMOVED WHEN THEY ARE IN A SIDE ROOM.

### Q Is there a vaccine or drugs available?

Annual flu vaccine will not provide protection. The virus that causes pandemic flu will be new and a vaccine to protect against it can only be manufactured when the virus has been identified. This may take months.

Antiviral drugs can be used to treat pandemic flu but their effectiveness won't be known until the pandemic virus is circulating.

**SPECIFIC TRAINING AND INFORMATION WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE WORKPLACE WHEN IT IS LIKELY A PANDEMIC IS IMMINENT. THIS WILL INCLUDE USE OF INFECTION CONTROL, VACCINE AND ANTIVIRAL DRUGS.**



**This is a world-wide problem - WE ALL HAVE OUR PART TO PLAY**



## POINTS TO REMEMBER!

- Hand hygiene is the most important infection prevention & control measure.
- Hand hygiene includes washing your hands with soap and water and/or using an alcohol based hand sanitiser.

### Hand hygiene should be carried out:

- before & after all direct patient contact
- after going to the toilet
- after handling any body fluids
- after touching your nose or mouth, coughing or sneezing
- after removing protective clothing - gowns, aprons, masks, gloves, visors
- before & after aseptic procedures
- before coming into contact with an immunocompromised patient
- before handling food and in between handling raw and cooked food
- before & after tea/lunch breaks
- after handling rubbish

**Hibiscrub** is only used for clinical contacts, aseptic/surgical procedures and after handling body fluids. Ordinary soap and water is sufficient at other times.

**Alcohol** hand sanitisers - only use when the hands are not physically contaminated.

## MORE INFO

For further information please contact your local Infection Control Team or Consultant in Communicable Disease Control

Keep up-to-date and informed to protect yourself and your patients and the general public!

Web links with regularly updated information on influenza:

Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (pandemic 'flu plan for Northern Ireland)  
[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/phealth/pandemic/pandemiccontingency.asp](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/phealth/pandemic/pandemiccontingency.asp)

Health Protection Agency  
[www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics\\_az/influenza/flu.htm](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/influenza/flu.htm)

World Health Organisation  
[www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/en/index.html)

Department of Health (London)  
[www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en)

# INFLUENZA PANDEMICS

## INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

COUGHS AND SNEEZES SPREAD DISEASES!

COVER YOUR MOUTH!

