



For Staff Education

# Influenza

## What is it?

- Influenza (the flu) is a viral disease of the respiratory tract
- Symptoms include fever, cough (usually dry), headache, muscle pain, fatigue, nasal congestion and sore throat
- Cough is severe and may last 2 or more weeks; most other symptoms resolve in 5-7 days

## How is it spread?

- Influenza is spread by droplets and contact
- Droplet spread occurs when someone with influenza coughs or sneezes into another person's eyes, nose or mouth
- Influenza is spread in the environment when people cough or sneeze onto surfaces, or touch surfaces with contaminated hands
- The virus can survive for hours on solid surfaces such as doorknobs and telephone handsets
- The virus can be picked up when someone touches a contaminated surface and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth
- Influenza exposure risk increases in areas where people live in close contact, such as in long-term care facilities

## Where is it found?

- Influenza is found in the respiratory tract of humans
- Animals, mostly birds and pigs, are natural reservoirs of influenza virus
- Influenza can be found in the environment for up to 48 hours on some surfaces
- Areas with low temperature and low humidity allow influenza to survive on solid surfaces for a longer period of time

## Prevention and control

- Clean hands well and often with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- Instruct residents and staff to cough into a tissue or their sleeve and clean their hands after sneezing or coughing
- Offer staff and clients/patients/residents the flu shot every year before the flu season begins
- Provide a private room for patients/residents if possible, otherwise, use spacing between beds to prevent transmission
- Use droplet and contact precautions (in addition to routine practices) when caring for anyone with a new or worsening cough and/or fever, or anyone confirmed or suspected of having influenza
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces on a regular basis to reduce risk of contact exposure from influenza