

## **INFLUENZA (FLU)**

In 2015, influenza activity globally has generally decreased or remained low with only a few countries reporting elevated levels of respiratory illness. Influenza activity in the Caribbean has remained at low levels with the exception of Cuba, where high numbers of severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) were reported, associated with the Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 pandemic influenza. Influenza AH1N1 is one of several influenza strains that circulates around the world, including the Caribbean region.

<p><b>What is Influenza?</b></p>	<p>A contagious respiratory illness caused mainly by two types of influenza viruses: influenza A and influenza B. It's not the same as the common cold but can be caught year round causing mild to severe illness.</p>
<p><b>How is Influenza spread?</b></p>	<p>A person infected with influenza may release tiny droplets containing the virus into the air when sneezing, coughing and talking. You may become infected if these droplets land on your nose, mouth or eyes.</p> <p>Infection may also occur if you touch any of these body parts after touching objects contaminated by infected droplets. Potentially contaminated objects include doorknobs, phones, television remotes or someone's hands.</p> <p>Those most vulnerable to becoming severely ill from influenza include the elderly, pregnant women and persons with chronic diseases.</p>
<p><b>What are the main symptoms of Influenza?</b></p>	<p>Main symptoms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fever of 38°C (100.4F) or above</li> <li>• tiredness and weakness</li> <li>• general aches and pains</li> <li>• headache</li> <li>• dry, chesty cough</li> </ul>
<p><b>Is there treatment for Influenza?</b></p>	<p>Persons should get adequate rest at home and drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. Paracetamol or ibuprofen can be used to reduce fever and to relieve aches if necessary.</p> <p>Persons should seek a physician if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• symptoms get worse over time or haven't improved after a week</li> <li>• pregnant</li> <li>• age 65 years or over</li> <li>• chest pain, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing develops</li> <li>• one has a chronic medical condition such as diabetes, heart or kidney disease</li> </ul> <p>Antiviral treatment may be useful if started within 48 hours of symptoms beginning following discussion with a physician.</p>
<p><b>Is there a vaccine for Influenza?</b></p>	<p>An influenza vaccine is available and vulnerable persons should get vaccinated every year since the viruses that cause influenza change every year.</p>
<p><b>How severe is the disease?</b></p>	<p>Most people recover within 1-2 weeks without requiring medical treatment. However in the very young, the elderly and persons with other serious medical conditions, infection can lead to severe complications of the underlying condition, pneumonia and death.</p>
<p><b>What can I do to protect myself and my family?</b></p>	<p>Good hygiene can help prevent you from catching influenza or spreading it to others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice proper handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds</li> <li>• Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as computer keyboards, telephones and door handles to get rid of germs</li> <li>• Cover mouth and nose with tissue or sleeve of shirt when coughing or sneezing. Do not cover with hands</li> <li>• Avoid touching of eyes, nose and mouth with dirty hands</li> <li>• Avoid contact with others by staying home if sick</li> </ul>

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