



School Health Flash Influenza

Influenza – commonly known as the “flu” – is a very contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. Influenza symptoms can include a fever, headache, muscle pain, a runny nose, sore throat, and cough. Although colds and various other viruses may cause similar symptoms, influenza weakens a person much more than other viruses. Influenza viruses spread easily through sneezing, coughing, and contact with infected people.

Hand washing is the single best way to prevent the spread of germs from one person to another. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15-20 seconds.

There is a safe and effective vaccine that protects against several strains of influenza. Influenza vaccine is safe, effective, recommended and provided free for children with certain immune system problems, certain chronic diseases and for **all** infants aged 6-23months and household/regular contacts of infants aged 0-23months. The influenza vaccine is provided free to many other groups of people. For people not eligible for free influenza vaccine, it is available at low cost to those who do not qualify.

Free influenza vaccine is available from your local health unit or family doctor for those individuals listed above as well as other high risk individuals. People not eligible for free influenza vaccine can purchase the vaccine through private clinics and doctors' offices. Please contact your local public health unit or family doctor if you have questions and/or to book an appointment for immunization. For more information on influenza and clinic times and dates, visit Northern Health at www.northernhealth.ca, BC HealthGuide OnLine at www.bchealthguide.org, or speak with a registered nurse at BC NurseLine 1-866-215-4700.