



## Influenza precautions

Influenza is at a very high rate whereby community sentinel surveillance showed that for every 100 persons that visit a family doctor, 16 of these are suffering from influenza. This exceeded the highest threshold level of last year. With a picture of high levels of flu across Europe, it is important to focus on prevention measures to prevent further spread.

Vaccination is the best prevention measure as it reduces the risk of catching flu, as well as spreading it to others. Apart from vaccination, one can avoid spreading flu through simple precautions, as flu is very infectious and easily spread to other people. A person is likely to give it to others in the first 5 days of symptoms. To reduce the risk of spreading flu it is important to wash hands often with warm water and soap, use tissues when you cough or sneeze and bin used tissues as quickly as possible. Avoidance of attending to work or school when sick is important to prevent spread of flu.

Flu symptoms come on very quickly and can include a sudden fever, aching body, feeling tired or exhausted, dry or chesty cough, sore throat, headache, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, diarrhoea or abdominal pain, nausea and being sick.

To help get better more quickly, rest and sleep, keep warm, take paracetamol to lower your temperature and treat aches and pain and drink plenty of water. A pharmacist can also be of support and recommend flu remedies to relieve symptoms. It is advisable for people who are suffering from influenza to seek advice from their family doctor especially if symptoms don't improve after 7 days; for young children; people who are 65 or over; for pregnant women; people who have chronic medical conditions, for example, diabetes or a heart, lung, kidney or neurological disease and people who have a weakened immune system, for example, because of chemotherapy or HIV. The family doctor will assess the patient and refer to further secondary care as required. Antibiotics are not recommended for flu as this is caused by viruses and will only be required for superimposed bacterial infections as prescribed by doctors.

Taking care of oneself this flu season is important to stay healthy and prevent flu through preventive measures including vaccination. For those who have not taken the flu vaccine, it is still indicated to be taken as we still have a number of weeks with the flu around us. The vaccine is available from health centres free of charge to all people above 6 months of age.

Yours truly

Dr Charmaine Gauci MD, MSc, PhD, FRSPH, FFPH  
Superintendent of Public Health