

# INFLUENZA AND IMMUNOSUPPRESSION

Seasonal flu is a contagious disease caused by the influenza virus. People with a compromised immune system due to a disease (for example: cancer, HIV/AIDS, congenital immune deficiency) or a treatment (chemotherapy, radiotherapy, corticosteroids or other immunosuppressive therapy) are at greater risk of serious flu infection and complications (hospitalization and death).

## IMMUNOCOMPROMISED PERSONS ARE MORE VULNERABLE

Immunosuppression makes people more vulnerable to serious flu complications. The degree of immunosuppression varies depending on the course of the disease and the type of treatment and must be evaluated on an individual basis by the attending physician.

## FLU SYMPTOMS

The flu can cause mild to serious symptoms and sometimes even lead to death. Infected persons experience at least one of the following symptoms:

- Fever, not always present, particularly among the elderly
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle or joint pain
- Headache
- Extreme fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting, particularly among children

Most people infected by the influenza virus will get better in just a few days, but immunocompromised individuals may develop more serious and sometimes fatal complications.

## FLU COMPLICATIONS

Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinusitis and otitis are among the most frequent complications of the flu but some people will develop even more serious complications which can sometimes be fatal.

## TREATING THE FLU

Fever and pain medication can ease flu symptoms. Antiviral medication against the influenza virus can help reduce the duration of symptoms and the risk of complications. It must be taken within 48 hours following onset of the first symptoms.

## PREVENTING THE FLU

The best way to prevent the flu is to receive the vaccine every year. Good hygiene habits such as washing your hands regularly and covering your mouth when coughing can help limit propagation of the flu and other respiratory viruses. Immunocompromised people should avoid visiting people who have the flu.

### **VACCINATION, YOUR BEST PROTECTION AGAINST THE INFLUENZA VIRUS**

**All immunocompromised people who are 6 months and older should receive the inactivated influenza vaccine.** Some immunocompromised people may not respond to the vaccine as well as healthy individuals. For this reason, it is recommended that family contacts be vaccinated. **The flu shot should be part of the management plan of all those who are immunocompromised.**

*Vaccination against serious pneumococcal infections (for example: blood infections, pneumonia, meningitis) is also recommended for immunocompromised individuals. Two different pneumococcal vaccines are recommended to ensure you are well protected. Ask your physician or the CLSC for information whether this type of vaccine is appropriate for you.*

I SPREAD HEALTH, NOT INFLUENZA.  
**I GET THE FLU SHOT.**