Protecting Yourself and Others from Acute Respiratory Infections

The viruses that cause respiratory tract infections, including influenza, cause more deaths and serious illness in Canada than any other group of viruses and bacteria. They also make a great many people feel miserable for a few days, and miss work and school.

These viruses cause some or all of: stuffy/runny nose, sore throat, cough, fever and/or chills, hoarseness, chest "wheeziness", muscle aches and pains, and fatigue. Most otherwise healthy people get better in a few days, but very young children, older adults, and people with underlying chronic illness may develop pneumonia or other complications.

There are some simple things that, if we all do them, can significantly reduce the risk that any of us will get sick, and protect vulnerable people among us from developing severe illness. Each of these things make it more difficult for the viruses to spread.

They are:

1. Wash your hands at least 5 times per day, every day.

2. Stay home for the first 1 to 2 days when you have new symptoms of an acute respiratory infection.

    • going to school or work may demonstrate that you are dedicated, but you won't be working at your best, and you will infect others

    • going shopping, or to the movies, will help the virus to spread to others as well

3. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and wash your hands after you have handled the tissue. If you don't have a tissue, use your sleeve. When you are coughing or sneezing, make sure your head is turned away from others around you.

4. Get your influenza vaccine every fall. It won't protect you from brand new influenza viruses, but it protects you well from regular seasonal influenza, which still kills 4,000 Canadians every year.