



Influenza in Community Congregate Settings

Background:

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Some people, such as people 65 years and older, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at higher risk of serious flu complications. There are two main types of influenza (flu) viruses: types A and B. The influenza A and B viruses that routinely spread person to person (human influenza viruses) are responsible for seasonal flu epidemics each year. The best way to reduce the risk of influenza infection and its potentially serious complications is by getting vaccinated each year.

Symptoms Associated with Influenza:

Symptoms of influenza include:

- Fever/feeling feverish or chills (Not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

**It is important to note that older adults and other congregate living residents, including those who are medically fragile and those with neurological or neurocognitive conditions, may manifest atypical signs and symptoms of influenza virus infection and may not have fever.*

How long does it take from exposure to onset of symptoms?

Once a person is exposed and infected with influenza, to when symptoms begin is about two days (this is known as the incubation period). However, this can range from about one to four days. It is important to note that someone with influenza is contagious beginning one day **before** onset of symptoms and up to five to seven days **after** becoming sick.

Risk Factors Associated with Contracting Influenza:

Anyone can get influenza (even healthy people), and serious problems related to influenza can happen at any age, but some people are at higher risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes people 65 years and older, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), pregnant people, and children younger than 5 years.

Treatment for Influenza

All residents within a congregate setting with confirmed or suspected influenza should receive antiviral treatment immediately. Starting treatment of antiviral drugs 1-2 days after influenza symptoms begin can lessen symptoms and shorten the time you are sick by 1 or 2 days. For people at higher risk of serious influenza complications, antiviral drugs can mean the difference between milder or more serious illness.

Case Investigation and Outbreak Response in Community Congregate Settings (Congregate Living Facilities, Shelters, Correctional Settings, etc.):

- Upon the identification of a staff or resident with upper respiratory symptoms in alignment with a potential influenza infection*, exclude the ill individuals from the general population and link to care for proper diagnosis. If there is high clinical suspicion of influenza (either due to known exposure or prior exclusionary test results of other diseases) exists, providers can consider treating the case empirically with antivirals to prevent severity of illness.
- Daily screening of all staff and residents should occur for at least 7 days following the identification of a confirmed or suspected case of influenza to ensure no further spread has occurred. Continue to link symptomatic individuals to care and exclude them from the general population until medically cleared.
- Report all probable or confirmed cases of influenza to the Chicago Department of Public Health: <https://redcap.link/specpopreport>.
- Depending on the extent of exposure and type of congregate living facility the outbreak has occurred in, it may be recommended to treat all other residents and staff on affected units with antiviral chemoprophylaxis to prevent spread. Please follow-up with the Special Populations team at CDPH to determine most effective outbreak response that is in alignment with your facility's needs.
- Continue to follow other prevention strategies listed below.

**Even if it is not influenza season, influenza testing should occur when any residents have signs or symptoms that could be influenza, especially when a potential exposure has occurred or there is an active outbreak of influenza identified within the facility.*

Prevention Strategies for Influenza

Preventing the spread of influenza viruses within congregate settings requires a multi-faceted approach including:

1. **Vaccination:** Influenza vaccination should be offered and documented annually to all residents and staff (if possible). Vaccination for influenza begins in September and can be given until late spring. Ideally, individuals should receive their annual influenza before the beginning of November.
2. **Screening and treatment of ill staff and residents:** Upon the identification of a case of influenza within a congregate setting, it is recommended that all staff and residents be screened daily for at least 7 days for signs and symptoms of influenza, efficiently isolated from the general population, and linked to care, as needed.
3. **Antiviral Chemoprophylaxis:** When at least two patients within 72 hours of each other are ill and when at least one resident influenza case is laboratory confirmed, the facility should promptly initiate antiviral chemoprophylaxis to all non-ill residents on affected units, regardless of whether they have received seasonal influenza vaccination. Please reach out to your clinical care provider to develop a plan for distribution of chemoprophylaxis, in the event of an influenza outbreak in your facility.
4. **Promote good hand hygiene and cough etiquette:** Ensure all staff and residents are performing hand hygiene on a regular basis (either washing their hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub) and covering their cough appropriately.
5. **Other prevention and control measures:** The proper cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces can also assist with the prevention of influenza. Ensure all staff are using the correct products for each surface type and following the written instructions for use.

Resources:

Organization	Contact Information:
CDPH Community Congregate Settings Team	Email: SpecialPops@cityofchicago.org Reporting Link: https://redcap.link/specpopreport