

Influenza

Information for managers and infection control and prevention staff

Influenza.
Don't get it.
Don't give it.

Influenza (flu) season is nearly upon us, so it's time to get prepared as flu can spread quickly in long term care facilities (LTCFs).

Influenza can be severe in LTCFs due to the age and pre-existing health conditions of residents.

We recommend the following actions to help prevent residents, staff, whanau and visitors from getting sick.

1. Make it easy for staff and residents to get immunised.

Recent NZ research identified that 80% of people who get influenza might not have any symptoms, but can pass flu on to residents, other staff and their families. The influenza vaccine is available at medical centres and selected pharmacies. This year's vaccine protects against 4 flu strains. It is very important for staff, in particular pregnant women and adults who have an underlying health condition (that may make them more susceptible to becoming very sick) to be immunised. Immunisation is free for people¹ with certain health conditions.

- Arrange on-site vaccination for residents.
- Offer immunisation to your staff through a workplace vaccinator, local GP or pharmacist.
- Allow staff to get immunised by their GP or pharmacist during work hours.

2. Prevent the spread of illness in your facility by ensuring that:

- Visitors with flu like symptoms are discouraged from visiting.
- Ill staff are not at work.
- Ill residents stay away from communal areas and have meals in their room while unwell.
- Staff use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when caring for ill residents.
- Everyone covers their mouth and nose with tissues when coughing and sneezing. Used tissues are put in a covered bin or plastic bag then hands are either washed or cleaned with hand sanitiser.
- Residents and staff wash their hands regularly. Alcohol-based hand gel can also be used to supplement hand washing.
- Regularly touched surfaces are frequently cleaned e.g. door handles, counter tops, bathroom areas, as viruses can live up to 48 hours on hard surfaces.
- Posters about handwashing and preventing influenza are visible around your facility. Posters accessible at www.rph.org.nz/influenza-ltcf

3. Share the following information by email or notice board to keep staff, residents and their families and visitors healthy:

- 2019 'Flu can be anywhere' brochure and RPH 'Influenza' brochure. Both accessible at www.rph.org.nz/influenza.

4. Notify Regional Public Health on 04 570 9002 of possible outbreaks.

An outbreak is defined as: 3 staff or residents unwell within 48 hours, or 4 staff or residents within 7 days in the same wing or part of the facility, should be treated as an outbreak until proven otherwise.

¹ Details about the free flu vaccination for people at most risk can be found at www.fightflu.co.nz