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Background and Guidance for Prevention and Management of Influenza (the Flu) in Sport Participants

This guidance is based on the best available scientific evidence and is subject to review and change as new information becomes available. For the most up to date information, please visit: manitoba.ca

Introduction

This document has been developed by Manitoba Health to provide guidance to sport participants about the prevention and management of influenza (the flu).

Influenza

Influenza, often called “the flu”, is an acute respiratory disease caused by a virus. People usually recover from the flu without medical help.

The flu spreads easily from person to person when the virus is released from an infected person’s coughing and sneezing and enters the nose and/or throat of another person. The virus can also rest on hard surfaces for a number of hours, so someone who touches the surface and then their mouth, nose and/or eyes can also become infected.

People are usually contagious the day before they develop symptoms and are most contagious during the first three to five days of the illness. Children and people with weakened immune systems may be contagious for a longer period of time.

Flu Symptoms

Flu symptoms usually appear suddenly and can include cough and a fever, sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain and exhaustion. Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea. Elderly people, young children and people with lowered immunity may not have a fever. Not everyone who gets the flu develops symptoms but they still may be able to spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze.

Infection Prevention

All sport participants should follow routine measures to prevent the spread of infection, including:

- **Hand Hygiene**

Participants should wash their hands regularly with soap and water, especially after coughing and sneezing. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers may be an acceptable alternative if hands are not visibly soiled.

- **Cough and sneeze etiquette**

Participants should be taught to follow cough and sneeze etiquette practices, including coughing into a sleeve or elbow or using a tissue to cover their nose or mouth. Tissues should be placed in the garbage immediately.

- **Don't share**

Avoid sharing water bottles, eating utensils, or other items that come in contact with your mouth. Players should also limit sharing personal items such as towels, toiletries, pillows, headphones, and other personal equipment.

- **Cleaning**

It is recommended that frequently touched surfaces be cleaned regularly, including wiping down sports equipment between users, washing water bottles regularly with soap and warm water and keeping uniforms clean.

However, no special disinfectants or waste handling practices are needed for the flu. Regular household or commercially available cleaning products are sufficient for this purpose and waste handling should follow usual standards. All sinks in washrooms, kitchens and other activity areas within sporting facilities should be well stocked with hand washing supplies at all times (ex: soap and paper towels).

Education

- Provide participants, staff and volunteers with information about the flu, including symptoms and when a participant or staff member should be sent home due to flu-like symptoms.
- Educate participants, staff and volunteers on good hygiene practices, including proper hand washing and cough etiquette.
- Post age-appropriate signs about cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene in publicly accessible areas.
- Post signs and/or provide education to discourage sharing of water bottles, drinks, eating utensils or other items that come in contact with the mouth.

Flu Symptoms in Players, Staff or Volunteers

Individuals who become ill with flu symptoms while participating in sports activities should be sent home as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

When possible, people with flu symptoms who are waiting to go home should stay in an area away from others, with adequate supervision, until they can go home. Good hand hygiene and cough etiquette practices are recommended.

Travel to away games or other events should be avoided until an individual is feeling well enough to participate.

If a participant becomes ill on the road and cannot return home, the following precautions are recommended:

- **Limit contact**

Individuals with flu symptoms should be advised to limit contact with others until they are well enough to participate in day-to-day activities, including sports activities. Good hand hygiene and cough etiquette are recommended.

- **Accommodation**

Ideally, individuals with flu symptoms who reside in shared living accommodations, such as hotel rooms, should be in their own room. If accommodations must be shared, individuals with flu symptoms should try to limit contact with others as much as possible.

- **Cleaning**

Frequently touched surfaces (such as bathroom taps and doorknobs) should be cleaned with household cleaners, especially after they have been touched by an individual with flu symptoms. Uniforms can be laundered in the usual manner using routine laundry products and tumbled dry on a hot setting.

- **Seeking Medical Care**

The decision to seek medical care will be affected by factors such as age, existing health problems or the symptoms a person is experiencing at the time.

People who may be at risk for severe illness should contact their health care provider early if they have flu symptoms, including:

- people with a chronic medical condition (ex. heart or lung disease, diabetes etc.)
- people 65 years and older and others who may be frail, have mobility problems or live alone
- people with weakened immune systems
- people with other risks such as alcoholism
- pregnant women

Children under five, people of Aboriginal ancestry, disadvantaged populations (ex. homeless), people living in remote or isolated areas, and those with other risks such as severe obesity may also be at increased risk for severe illness from some types of flu (ex. H1N1).

People who are normally healthy and have symptoms of the flu should seek medical attention as soon as possible, if they experience any of the following:

- difficult or painful breathing
- coughing up bloody sputum (phlegm or saliva)
- wheezing
- fever for three to four days that is not getting better or is getting worse
- sudden return of high fever and other symptoms after initial improvement
- extreme ear pain

People who have difficulty breathing or are believed to be severely ill, dehydrated, extremely drowsy or confused should seek immediate medical attention by going to the nearest hospital emergency department or calling 911.

For more information

For additional information on the flu, please visit: manitoba.ca or call **Health Links-Info Santé** at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll-free).