

## Influenza

### What is Influenza?

Influenza is an acute, viral illness of the respiratory tract. The attack rate is highest in the young and mortality highest in the elderly. There are 3 types of influenza: influenza types A and B are responsible for epidemics and type C causes mild respiratory illness. It usually spread by person-to-person transmission – indirectly by droplets and directly through contact with respiratory secretions. There are 2 peaks for influenza every year in Hong Kong. A smaller attack around June to August, and a higher peak between February to April. Virus can be recovered from secretions for 10 days.

### Symptoms of Influenza

- Incubation period 1-5 days
- Rapid onset of fever, chills, headaches, muscle pain and extreme fatigue
- Dry cough, pharyngeal pain, nasal obstruction / discharge
- Resolves after 1-2 weeks

### Treatment and Prevention of Influenza

Anti-influenza drugs are now available which are effective in reducing the severity and duration of the illness if taken early enough. It is also useful for those with definite exposure to infectious cases. These drugs are expensive and have potential side effects, and are best prescribed by qualified doctors.

Vaccination is recommended annually to protect against new emerging strains. This should be given to adults and children (> 6 months) with frequent medical care visits, chronic medical conditions or immunosuppression, as well as health care professionals. Other possible target groups include: persons > 50 years of age, and pregnant women in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester during flu season. Usually one intramuscular dose is sufficient in adults, it is around 70-90% effective in healthy individuals. Development of antibodies occurs in 2 weeks in adults and in 6 weeks in children.