
Facts about influenza pandemic vaccine and antiviral drugs

This fact sheet provides basic information for health care workers.

If an influenza pandemic occurs in Ontario, a vaccine will not be available at the start of pandemic, as the virus will be new. It can take four to five months for a vaccine to be developed against a new flu virus.

Antiviral drugs may be used to help lessen the impact of the pandemic and may be effective in very early treatment.

What's the difference between vaccines and antivirals?

- **Vaccines** are the primary means to prevent illness and death from regular seasonal influenza. They cause the production of antibodies against the flu virus included in the vaccine, providing immunity against the virus.
- **Antivirals** are drugs used for the prevention and early treatment of influenza. If taken shortly after getting sick (within 48 hours), they can reduce influenza symptoms, shorten the length of illness and reduce the serious complications of influenza.
- **Antivirals** will likely be the only medical intervention during the initial pandemic response.
- **Antivirals** work by reducing the ability of the virus to reproduce but do not provide immunity against the virus.
- **Antiviral** protection is virtually immediate when taken for prevention and lasts as long as the medication is taken.
- An actual vaccine against a pandemic cannot be manufactured until the virus has emerged.

Vaccine preparation

- ID Biomedical, the domestic supplier of vaccine, will manufacture vaccine that is specific to the pandemic strain.
- The vaccine will be distributed equitably throughout Canada, based on ID Biomedical's capacity to produce the vaccine.

Availability and use of a vaccine

- Individuals may need up to two doses of the pandemic vaccine approximately one month apart, as most people will have no prior exposure to the pandemic strain.
- Ontario's plan is to obtain enough vaccine for the entire population but, during the early stages of a pandemic, vaccine will be in short supply.
- In this situation, the vaccine will be provided through special clinics to those at risk of influenza complications and those most likely to transmit influenza to high risk groups.

Availability and use of antivirals

- The federal government contributed \$24 million towards the creation of a national antiviral stockpile.
- The national antiviral stockpile will be used to treat and protect identified priority groups agreed upon by a national expert advisory committee on influenza pandemic.
- The federal government is responsible for approving and licensing antivirals.
- In preparation for a pandemic when availability of antivirals is limited, both the

federal and the Ontario governments have begun to create an antiviral stockpile.

- Antivirals will be directed at treating those at high risk of complications or death due to influenza who present with influenza-like illness within 48 hours of onset of symptoms.
- Ontario will be adopting priority groups set nationally. These priority groups may change based on: age and risk groups most affected by the pandemic; its severity; and other factors.

For more information

www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/emu_mn.html

Or call toll free:

Health Care Provider's Hotline 1-866-212-2272