

# INFLUENZA AND PERSONS WITH HEART DISEASE

Seasonal flu is a contagious disease caused by the influenza virus. People who suffer from heart disease are at greater risk of acute flu infection and serious complications (hospitalization and death).

## PERSONS WITH HEART DISEASE ARE MORE VULNERABLE

Heart disease makes people more vulnerable to serious flu complications. More than one third of persons hospitalized each year due to the flu suffer from heart disease. The flu is associated with an increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

## FLU SYMPTOMS

The flu can cause mild to serious symptoms and sometimes even lead to death. Infected persons experience at least one of the following symptoms:

- Fever, not always present, particularly among the elderly
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle and joint pain
- Headache
- Extreme fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting, particularly among children

Most people infected by the influenza virus will get better in just a few days, but persons who suffer from heart disease may experience a rapid deterioration in their general health.

## FLU COMPLICATIONS

The flu may aggravate respiratory difficulties in people suffering from chronic heart failure and exacerbate other cardiac symptoms.

Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinusitis and otitis are among the most frequent complications of the flu but some people will develop even more serious complications which can sometimes be fatal.

## TREATING THE FLU

Fever and pain medication can ease flu symptoms. Antiviral medication against the influenza virus can help reduce the duration of symptoms and the risk of complications. It must be taken within 48 hours following onset of the first symptoms.

## PREVENTING THE FLU

The best way to prevent the flu is to receive the vaccine every year. Good hygiene habits such as washing your hands regularly and covering your mouth when coughing can help limit propagation of the flu and other respiratory viruses. Persons with heart disease should avoid visiting people who have the flu.

### VACCINATION, YOUR BEST PROTECTION AGAINST THE INFLUENZA VIRUS

**All people with heart disease who are 6 months and older should receive the influenza vaccine.** Data supports the preventive effect of vaccination among people with heart disease. The vaccine reduces the risk of catching the flu and, if the infection does occur, it reduces the risk of complications. **The flu shot should be part of the management plan of those who suffer from heart disease.**

*Vaccination against serious pneumococcal infections (for example: blood infections, pneumonia, meningitis) is also recommended for people with heart disease. Two different pneumococcal vaccines are recommended to ensure your protection. Ask your physician or the CLSC.*

I SPREAD HEALTH, NOT INFLUENZA.  
**I GET THE FLU SHOT.**