



Look after yourself

How to care for yourself and the people you care about

Pandemic preparedness

An influenza pandemic is a world wide outbreak of severe influenza (flu).

During an influenza pandemic, demand for health care services will increase at the same time as health care workers are ill with influenza themselves or are staying home to look after sick family members.

Most people who get influenza will not be sick enough to require medical care and can be looked after at home.

We've put together a series of fact sheets and other tools to help you prepare to look after yourself and the people you care about during an influenza pandemic.

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Pandemic influenza: what you need to know

What is influenza?

Influenza (the flu) is a highly contagious viral disease. The virus causes an infection of the respiratory tract, including the nose, nasal passages, throat, lungs and bronchial tubes. There are three types of influenza: A, B and C. Only type A causes pandemics in humans.

What is pandemic influenza?

An influenza pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of severe influenza A. Pandemics are caused by new strains of influenza A or strains that may not have circulated among humans for a long time, so people have little or no immunity to them. Pandemic influenza can strike at any time of the year and can cause much more sickness and death than seasonal influenza.

When will the next pandemic happen?

We don't know when the next pandemic will happen. Our experience tells us that it's only a matter of time. In the twentieth century there were three pandemics — in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Pandemics can affect communities in “waves”. After a first peak of illness, the rates of illness drop, then one or more waves occur over a period of months.

Will there be a vaccine against pandemic influenza?

Once the strain of influenza that causes a pandemic is identified, it may take several months to develop a vaccine. There may be no vaccine available during the first “wave” of a pandemic. When a vaccine does become available, it will be in short supply. Canadian influenza experts have identified high-risk groups who will receive the vaccine first.

Will there be medications to prevent or cure pandemic influenza?

National and provincial governments are stockpiling enough antiviral medications to treat everyone in Canada who may become ill with pandemic influenza. Planners have identified high-risk groups to whom antiviral medications will be given first.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from person to person through droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. These droplets can travel up to a metre (3 feet) and can be inhaled by others. These droplets also land on surfaces. If a person touches an object that has been contaminated by droplets and then touches their eyes, mouth or nose, without first washing their hands, they can catch the flu. The time from when a person is exposed to the virus to the time symptoms appear is 1 – 3 days. The virus can survive on hard surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails and toys for up to 48 hours. The virus survives on your hands for 5 minutes.



How long is the influenza virus infectious/contagious?

A person with the flu is contagious for 24 hours before they become sick and for up to 7 days after becoming sick. Children may be contagious for longer than a week.

How do I know if I have influenza?

You may have the flu if you have a sudden onset of fever, cough, headache, muscle pain, sore throat, a runny nose and body aches. Sometimes children with influenza will have nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Older adults (over 65) and children under 5 may not have a fever when sick with influenza. Although colds and other viruses may cause similar symptoms, influenza weakens a person much more than other viruses. Most healthy people will feel better in about 5 – 7 days. Complications of influenza, such as pneumonia, can be more severe for the elderly, for infants and for people with chronic health problems.

Is it a cold or influenza?

Symptom	FLU (Influenza)	COLD (Rhino Virus)
Fever	Usual, sudden onset 38°C-40°C and lasts 3-4 days	Rare
Headache	Usual and can be severe	Rare
Aches and pains	Usual and can be severe	Rare
Fatigue and weakness	Usual and can last 2-3 weeks or more	Sometimes, but mild
Extreme fatigue	Usual, early onset can be severe	Rare
Nausea, vomiting	In children under 5 years of age	Rare
Runny, stuffy nose	Rare	Usual
Sneezing	Rare	Usual
Sore throat	Rare	Usual
Chest discomfort	Usual and can be severe	Sometimes, but mild to moderate
Complications	Respiratory failure; can worsen a current chronic condition; can be life-threatening	Congestion or earache
Prevention	Flu shot; pneumococcal vaccine for those at risk of complications; frequent hand washing, cover your cough and sneezes	Frequent hand washing, cover your cough and sneezes

Stay healthy during an influenza pandemic

Personal health & hygiene

You can reduce your chances of catching the flu and improve your chances of a speedy recovery by looking after yourself.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water or use a hand sanitizer. Regular handwashing has been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of respiratory disease.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or cough or sneeze into your sleeve. **Cover your Cough poster**
- Eat nutritious foods, including plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Exercise in moderation.
- Get your annual flu shot.
- Don't smoke and don't allow others to smoke in the house or car.
- Get the pandemic influenza vaccine, when it is available.
- Stay home if you are sick or feel unwell; rest and drink plenty of fluids.



Avoid crowds

The more time you spend in contact with others during a pandemic, the more likely you are to be in contact with someone who is carrying the influenza virus. Take steps to limit your contact with others during a pandemic.

- Limit visitors to your home.
- Shop at smaller stores with shorter line-ups.
- Shop at off-peak hours at stores that stay open late or are open 24 hours.
- If possible, phone your grocery order in for quick pick-up or delivery.
- Pay your bills at an ATM, on-line or over the phone.
- Cancel or postpone family outings or gatherings.
- Work from home or arrange to work flexible hours, if possible.

Stay healthy at work or school

Take steps to reduce your chances of catching the flu during a pandemic.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water or use a hand sanitizer.
- Work from home or arrange to work flexible hours, if possible.
- Clean objects, such as phones and hard surfaces that are handled by many people, with a disinfectant.
- Keep your office door closed.
- Use stairs instead of crowded elevators.
- If you must meet with people, stay a metre (3 feet) apart.
- Avoid shaking hands, kissing or hugging people.
- Cancel unnecessary meetings; use teleconferencing or video conferencing, telephone, e-mails or fax.
- Travel on public transit at off peak hours, drive your car, walk or ride your bike to and from work or school.
- Take your lunch and eat it at your desk or away from others; avoid crowded cafeterias and restaurants.

Be prepared

If you become ill with the flu, you should stay home, rest in bed and drink plenty of fluids. You should be prepared to cope at home for up to a week.

Have a fever thermometer in your emergency kit.

Stock up on:

- Non-perishable food items, such as canned or frozen soups, juices, fruits and vegetables, canned fish, crackers, peanut butter.
- Household cleaning supplies, such as bleach or disinfectant, dishwashing soap and paper towels.
- Personal hygiene products such as soap, hand sanitizer, shampoo and toilet paper.
- Basic over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol™ or Tempra™) for fever.
- Prescription medications (two to three month's supply, if possible).

Look after others

During a pandemic you can help others to stay healthy.

- Check up on family, friends and neighbours, especially those who live alone.
- Offer to get groceries and run errands for those who are at higher risk of getting influenza or serious complications from influenza, such as seniors or people with chronic medical conditions.
- Keep emergency phone numbers and self-care instructions in a place where everyone in the household can find them.
- Schools and community centres may be closed; keep books and games at home for children to play with.
- Arrange for child care that reduces your children's exposure to crowds.
- Make arrangements for school work to be done from home.

Housekeeping

Influenza viruses can live for up to 2 days on hard surfaces. Washing hard surfaces (taps, counters, doorknobs, telephones, railings) with a disinfectant, such as a 10% bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) will kill the influenza virus. Surfaces that are touched frequently with the hands should be cleaned thoroughly and often.

If a member of your household is ill with influenza:

- Keep their personal items separate from those of the rest of the household.
- Don't share towels.
- Don't share eating utensils or drinks with anyone (remember, you may not know who is infectious).
- Keep an adequate supply of products for handwashing and cleaning.

There's no need for special handling of laundry or linen from a person who may have influenza; launder as usual.

There's no need for special handling of garbage generated by a person with influenza.

If someone dies

During a pandemic some people may die at home. The remains of those who die at home should be wrapped in a sheet and kept in a cool, dry place until funeral services are available to collect the body. Bodies of people who have died from influenza are not contagious to others.

What about pets?

Most family pets are not at risk for getting or passing on influenza. Pigs, birds and horses are at risk for getting influenza. If you have these animals as pets or live on a farm, take special care to wash your hands after contact with them.



Hand washing

Hand washing is the best way to stop the spread of influenza and other viruses.

When you wash your hands, you wash away viruses and bacteria that you may have picked up from people, contaminated surfaces or animals and animal waste.

Wash your hands:

- Before, during and after you prepare food.
- Before you eat.
- After using the toilet.
- After changing an infant or adult diaper.
- After sneezing or coughing or blowing your nose.
- After blowing a child's nose.
- When your hands are dirty.
- More frequently when someone in your household is sick.
- After touching commonly used items, such as door knobs, railings, bank machines.

Use soap and warm water to wash your hands. Do not use antibacterial soap; it encourages antibiotic resistance.

Carry hand sanitizer with you to disinfect your hands, if soap and water are not available. You can find hand sanitizer in most supermarkets and drug stores.

Here are posters showing you how to wash your hands and use hand sanitizer properly. Post them in kitchens and bathrooms at home, work or school.

How To Wash Your Hands

How To Use a Hand Sanitizer

What to do if someone gets sick

Providing care at home to someone with influenza will be common during an influenza pandemic. Ask for help from family members or friends if you live alone, are a single parent with small children or are having a hard time looking after yourself or others.

Stay home when you are feeling ill

- Do not go to work or school; you could spread influenza to others.
- Avoid other people until at least seven days after your symptoms start.
- Stay in your room as much as possible. Try to keep a metre – 3 feet – of distance between you and others in the household who are not sick.
- If more than one person in the home is ill, they can share a room.



Get plenty of rest

- You will probably feel very tired and weak. Resting allows your body to recover from influenza.

Drink plenty of fluids

- Water, juices, clear broths and soups will replace the fluids lost, especially if you have a fever.
- If your urine is dark, drink more fluids.
- Try to drink a glass of water for every hour that you are awake.
- Warm fluids may also help loosen up mucus in your throat and lungs.

Treat fever or muscle aches at home

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™) may provide some comfort. Always follow the directions on the package about how much and how often to take acetaminophen.

Never give products containing ASA (acetylsalicylic acid, such as Aspirin™) to any child under the age of 18 years. Use of ASA products by children can lead to Reye's syndrome, a serious condition affecting the nervous system and the liver.

If you have any concerns,

Call BC NurseLine

Toll-free in BC

1-866-215-4700

In Greater Vancouver

604-215-4700

Deaf and hearing-impaired

1-866-889-4700

Over-the-counter cough and influenza remedies

If you are buying an over-the-counter medication, check with the pharmacist to see which one is best for you:

- Tell the pharmacist if you are taking other medications or if you have any chronic medical conditions.
- Buy a remedy that treats only one symptom at a time (that way you are not taking substances you may not need or that may cause an unwanted reaction).
- Read the label carefully to see if the ingredients treat the symptom you want to treat.
- Read the label and note any side effects or interactions with other medications.
- Take only the recommended dose on the label.
- Start with a standard dose first; it may work fine. Extra strength remedies contain a higher dose of medication and may cause more side effects.

If you have any questions about medications, talk to your pharmacist. The BC NurseLine has a pharmacist available from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. daily.

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Other products

During a pandemic, you may hear stories of cures and medications promising to prevent or cure influenza. It's important to remember that only antiviral medications and vaccines, regulated by Health Canada, have been tested and found to be safe for humans. Beware of false promises. If you have any doubts or questions about a product, speak with a pharmacist or your doctor.

Fevers & fever (febrile) seizures

In most cases, a fever is not serious and is a good sign that your body is working to fight off an illness.

What to do for fever

- Take off heavy clothing and blankets.
- Dress in lightweight clothing and keep room temperature at 20°C.
- Give lukewarm sponge or tub baths (never use alcohol rubs to bring down a fever).
- Offer cool fluids frequently when the person is awake.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol™ or Tempra™) every 4-6 hours for comfort and to reduce fever. **Never give ASA (Aspirin™) to children.**
- Allow the person to rest and stay home if possible for at least 7 days (to avoid spreading influenza to other people).

How to take a temperature

What are fever seizures?

A fever seizure is a convulsion in a child caused by a rapid rise of body temperature to over 39°C (102.2 °F). Most seizures occur within the first day of the child becoming sick and not always when the fever is the highest. Sometimes the seizure is the first sign of a fever in an infant or child.

Signs that your child may be having a fever seizure

The child may:

- experience sudden stiffness of the muscles of the face, arms or legs on both sides of the body.
- cry or moan.
- fall if standing and may pass urine.
- vomit or bite their tongue.
- stop breathing and may begin to turn blue.
- begin to have jerky movements.
- not respond to voice or touch.

A **simple fever seizure** will stop by itself within a few seconds to 10 minutes. It is followed by a brief period where the child is sleepy or confused. Medication is not needed.

A **complex fever seizure** lasts longer than 15 minutes, occurs in one part of the body and happens again during the same illness.

What to do if your child has a fever seizure

- Stay calm.
- Leave your child on the floor (you may want to slip a blanket under the child if the floor is hard).
- Loosen tight clothing, especially around the neck.
- Move the child only if he or she is in a dangerous location.
- Turn the child on her or his side or stomach to protect the head and to prevent the child from choking if he or she vomits.
- Don't hold your child down.
- Don't force anything into the mouth as this increases the risk of injury.
- Observe closely and time the fever seizure, so you can tell the doctor what happened.

Seek medical attention

- A doctor should see children as soon as possible after their first fever seizure.
- If the seizure ends quickly, take your child to the family doctor or emergency department.
- If the child is stable, you can also call **BC NurseLine**

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- If the seizure lasts longer than 10 minutes, call 911 to have an ambulance take your child to the hospital.
- A doctor should see the child, if there are repeated seizures during the same illness or if this looks like a new type of seizure for your child.

Preventing further fever seizures

If your child has a history of fever seizures and has a fever:

- Give your child acetaminophen at the first sign of fever (you may want to have acetaminophen suppositories on hand).
- Sponge or bathe your child in lukewarm water. You may want to apply cool washcloths to the forehead and neck.
- Offer your child cool drinks.

How to take a temperature

There are 3 ways to take a temperature: **1 In the mouth** **2 Under the armpit** **3 In the ear**

The right method for children depends on the child's age. It is important to get the most accurate temperature reading possible. For older children and teenagers, use the adult method.

The following chart will help you decide which method to use.

Age	Best Method	Second Best Method	Third Best Method
Birth to 2 years of age	Armpit	–	–
2 to 5 years of age	Ear	Armpit	–
5 years - Adult	Mouth	Ear	Armpit

Taking a temperature by mouth

- Place the tip of thermometer under tongue and close mouth.
- Do not bite down on the thermometer.
- Do not drink any hot or cold liquids (or smoke) for half an hour prior to taking a temperature.

Taking a temperature in the armpit

- Place the tip of the thermometer against the skin and hold the arm snugly against chest.



Taking a temperature in the ear

- Use a clean probe tip each time and follow the manufacturer's instructions very carefully.
- Gently tug on the ear, pulling it back and up. This will straighten the ear canal and make a clear path on the inside of the ear to the eardrum.
- Gently insert the thermometer until the ear canal is fully sealed off.
- Squeeze and hold the button down for one second.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.

Thermometers

There are several types of thermometer. Digital thermometers are made of unbreakable plastic and measure temperatures quickly. They display the temperature so it is easy to read.

If you have any questions when you buy a thermometer, ask the pharmacist, and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

If you don't have a thermometer, you can tell if someone has a fever by touching his or her skin. If the person's skin is hot and dry, if they have the "chills", if their mouth and lips are dry or if their cheeks are flushed, they may have a fever.

Fever strips will indicate a possible fever but are not an accurate way to measure a temperature.

How to measure breathing

For **adults and older children** watch the chest rise and fall. Use a watch or clock and count the number of times the chest rises (or expands) in one minute (60 seconds).

Children and infants use their stomachs to breathe. You should uncover the child so you can see the stomach. Count the number of times the stomach or chest rises in 30 seconds using a watch or clock. If you count for 30 seconds, you need to multiply by two in order to get the number of breaths per minute.

Compare the number you counted to the chart below. If the child's breathing rate is the same or over the number in the chart, it is a sign that the child is having trouble breathing and you should seek medical attention. If the child has other symptoms or behaviours that you are concerned about, seek medical advice.

Definition of fast breathing:

Age	Number of breaths per minute
Less than 2 months of age	Over 60 breaths per minute
2 to 12 months of age	Over 50 breaths per minute
Over 12 months to 5 years of age	Over 40 breaths per minute
Over 5 years of age	Over 30 breaths per minute

In children under 5 years of age, signs of trouble breathing include:

- grunting with breathing.
- whistling, squeaking or wheezing noise with breathing.
- flaring nostrils with each breath.
- chest rising opposite to the stomach rising.

When to seek medical care

Older children and teens have the same influenza symptoms as adults. Very young children and infants probably have similar symptoms, but do not know how to tell people they have sore muscles or a headache. These children may be irritable and eat poorly.

The following decision-making tools can help you decide when to seek medical care.

When to seek medical care for an infant or young child

When to seek medical care for older children or adolescents

When to seek medical care for an adult

Remember, if you have any questions or concerns, you can call your doctor or the BC NurseLine any time.

Call BC NurseLine	Toll-free in BC	1-866-215-4700
	In Greater Vancouver	604-215-4700
	Deaf and hearing-impaired	1-866-889-4700

Who to call

Print this page and put in on your refrigerator or near your telephone.

In case of emergency, call **911**

By telephone

Vancouver Coastal Health Influenza Line:	604- 875-4252	press 3
Call BC NurseLine	Toll-free in BC	1-866-215-4700
	In Greater Vancouver	604-215-4700
	Deaf and hearing-impaired	1-866-889-4700
BC Ministry of Health Information Desk:	1-800-465-4911	

On the web

Vancouver Coastal Health: www.vch.ca/pandemic

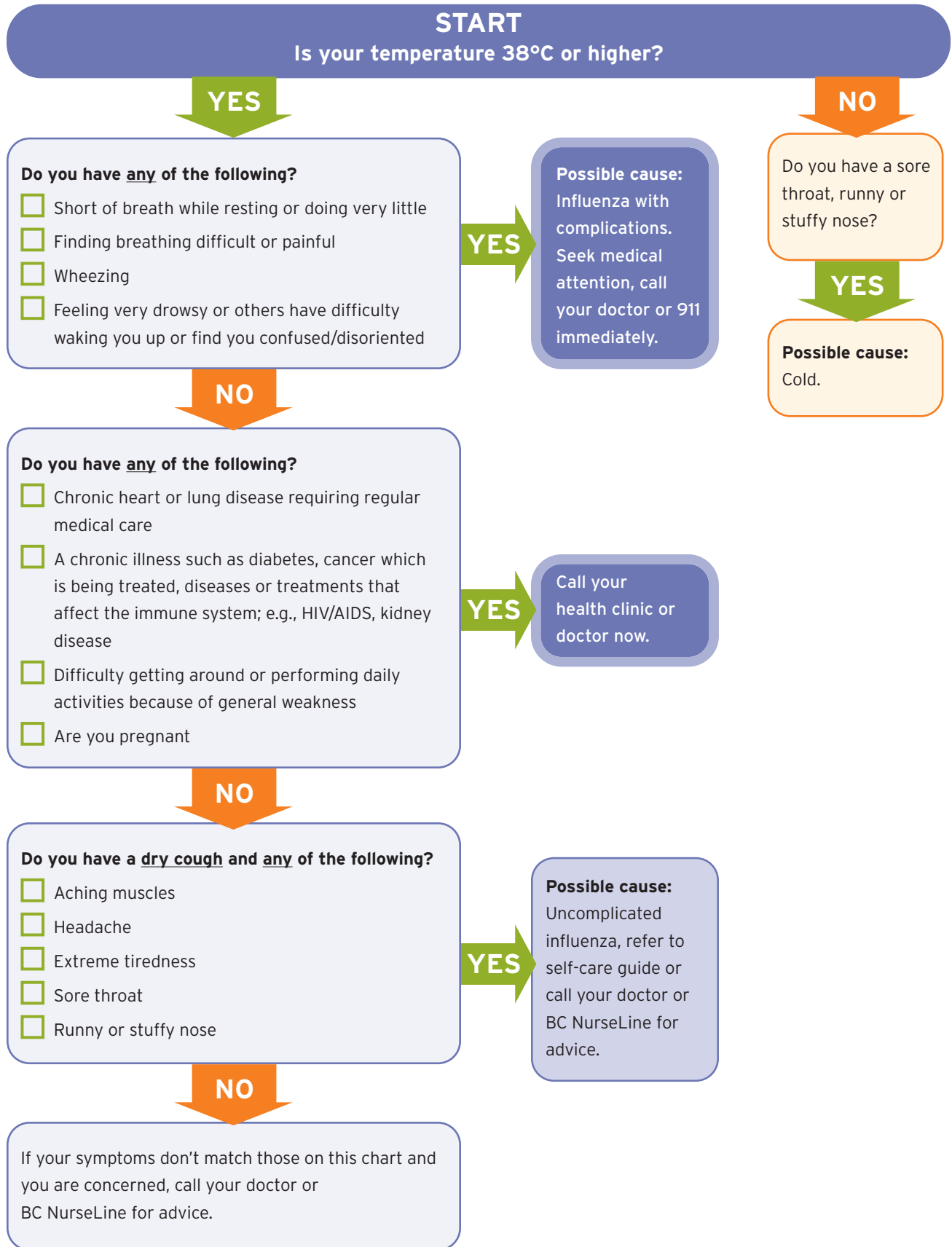
BC HealthGuide: www.bchealthguide.org/

Important phone numbers

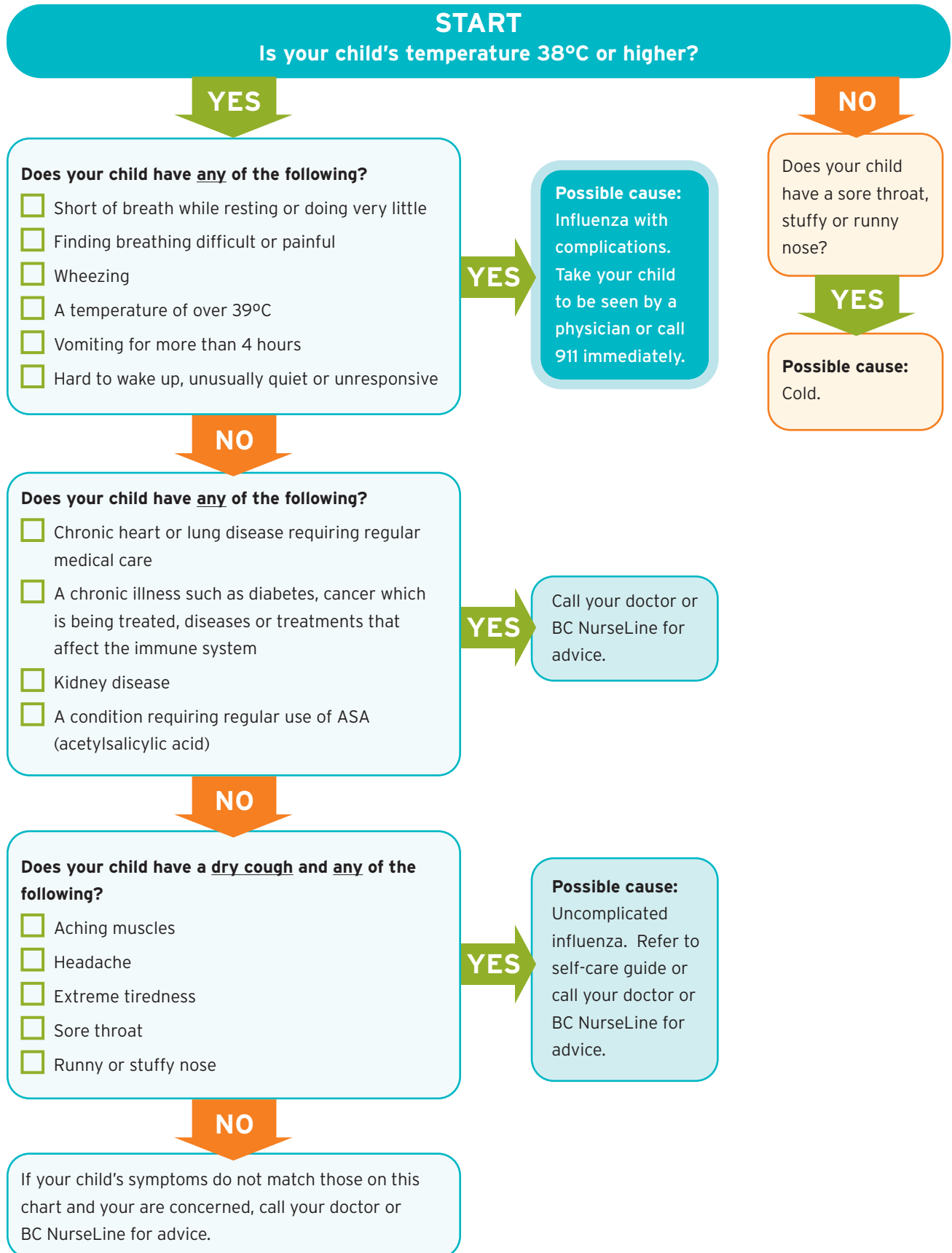
Doctor _____

Next of kin _____

When to seek medical care for an adult with influenza-like illness



When to seek medical care for an older child (6-16 yrs) with influenza-like illness



When to seek medical care for an infant or young child (to 6 years) with influenza-like illness



Pandemic Preparedness

Look after yourself

How to care for yourself and the people you care about