

## What you need to know about Infection control in waiting rooms



Influenza viruses, including H1N1 are spread from ill people to others by coughing or sneezing. These viruses may also be spread when people touch a surface or object that has the flu virus on it and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

When it comes to preventing the spread of influenza viruses, infection control practices are important in group settings like waiting rooms. The closeness of individuals in waiting rooms makes it easy for the virus to spread.

### Hand hygiene

Proper hand hygiene is extremely important in preventing the spread of influenza viruses. Hand hygiene can be done either by washing hands with liquid soap and water or by using a 70-90% alcohol-based hand rub.

It is important that people in waiting rooms or other group settings have access to hand sinks and/or alcohol-based hand rubs. Hand hygiene should be done on arrival to and exit from the waiting room.

### Make hand hygiene supplies accessible

- Mount alcohol-based hand rub dispensers on the wall or on a stand at the entrance to the office or waiting room for client use.
- Have alcohol-based hand rub available at the receptionist's desk.
- Ensure that washroom facilities are stocked with liquid soap, warm running water, paper towels or a hot air dryer at all times.
- Post hand hygiene signs and posters in the waiting room and washrooms.

### Cough etiquette

There may be people in the waiting room who are sick, and they could be coughing and sneezing.

- Ensure that tissues are available throughout the waiting room so everyone has access. Also ensure that waste baskets are made available and are cleaned out regularly so clients can properly dispose of used tissues.
- Post respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette signs in the waiting area as a reminder about proper practice. Proper practice includes coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your sleeve. Throw used tissues into a garbage right away and then practice hand hygiene.

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## Environmental cleaning and disinfecting

Influenza virus can remain on non-porous surfaces such as countertops, door knobs and tables for 24 – 48 hours and for 8 – 12 hours on cloth, paper and tissue. Viruses can survive on hands for five minutes. Keeping commonly touched surfaces clean can help to reduce the presence of germs and, in doing so, decrease the spread of illness.

It is important to clean and disinfect waiting rooms daily and it is best to do this at the end of each day. It is recommended that surfaces in the waiting room be in good condition, easily cleanable, and non-absorbent.

### Choosing Products

There are many commercial products that will kill the influenza virus. Many products available are a combination of cleaner and disinfectant. It is important to read the product label carefully and to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

- Look for the word "disinfectant" on the label.
- Follow the instructions for how long to leave the product on a surface.

Be cautious when using disinfectant on surfaces that come into contact with food or items that could be put in the mouth, like toys. On these surfaces, most products require a final rinse with clean water.

## Toys and magazines

Toys and items such as magazines can also be reservoirs for the influenza virus. As magazines cannot be properly cleaned and disinfected, they should be removed in waiting rooms when there are concerns about the spread of influenza.

### Toys should be:

- Non-absorbent and easily cleanable. Plush and cloth toys are not recommended.
- Cleaned and disinfected at the end of each day.
- Cleaned and disinfected by staff that have been trained following written procedures.

## Surveillance and social distancing

Limiting interaction between people who are ill and people who are well is thought to play a role in reducing the spread of illness in group settings.

### Where possible:

- Post signs asking people with influenza-like illness (fever with cough) to inform the reception.
- Provide a surgical mask to people with symptoms.
- Separate reception staff from clients by a minimum of two (2) meters or six (6) feet or behind a physical barrier like Plexiglas.
- Separate people who display influenza-like illness by at least (2) meters or six (6) feet from others in the waiting room. If possible have a separate waiting area for those who are ill.

## More information

- Contact Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services at 519 539-9800 or toll-free at 1 800 755-0394
- Visit the Oxford County website at [www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth](http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth)
- Visit the Public Health Agency of Canada website at [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

*Adapted from Middlesex-London Health Unit*

## References

- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. August 2009. Best practices for environmental cleaning in all health care settings.
- Jim Gauthier Presentation. November 2005. Infection Control in Doctor's Offices.
- The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. 2004 ed. Infection Control in the Physician's Office.
- Middlesex-London Health Unit. Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist for the Physician Office.