

## How do I protect myself? Q&A

### 1) What is the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP)?

The Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) is a living document that describes how Ontario's healthcare system will respond to an influenza pandemic. For more information visit:

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/pan\\_flu/pan\\_flu\\_plan.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/pan_flu/pan_flu_plan.html)

### 2) What is meant by “personal protective equipment” (PPE)?

Generally, personal protective equipment is equipment that helps protect individuals from the transmission of disease and illness. It typically includes masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection.

### 3) Why should a pharmacy stock up on personal protective equipment?

The OHPIP recommends that all health care providers plan for and maintain a 4-week stockpile of personal protective equipment, intended to cover the first half of a potential 8-week wave of influenza. During a pandemic, demand for such supplies will be high worldwide, so it is preferred to ensure that your pharmacy has stockpiled in advance.

### 4) What will be the role of pharmacists during an influenza pandemic?

According to Chapter 11 of the OHPIP, “as far as possible, Ontario will use the existing primary care system”. Patients will be encouraged to self-assess with the help on an algorithm, health care providers can screen patients over the phone (i.e., via Telehealth). Patients who are assessed to have influenza will be sent to a prescriber for diagnosis. Physicians and nurse practitioners will write prescriptions and pharmacists will dispense them.

It is unlikely that antiviral medications will be rescheduled to Schedule II status.

Please note that the OHPIP is a living document and OPA will update you on the role of the pharmacist during a health alert as changes are made.

### 5) As a pharmacist what precautions should I take?

The precaution that you take depends on the type of contact you have with patients your practice setting, and your pharmacy's policy. The Ontario College of Pharmacists has adopted *Infection Control for Regulated Professionals* which was developed as a resource and educational tool to help achieve safe and effective infection control practices, including personal protective equipment and surface cleaning/disinfection. In addition, during a health alert you may be required to wear an N95 mask.

### 6) What is an N95 mask?

“N” means “not resistant to oil”. The “95” refers to 95% filter efficiency against particulate aerosols free of oil when tested against a 0.3 micrometer particle. Healthcare professionals who may need to use N95 masks will need to be fit tested.

## 7) What does N95 fit testing entail?

There are two different versions of fit testing “Qualitative” and “Quantitative”, both of which are acceptable methods by CSA Z94.4 Standard on Selection.

Qualitative fit test (QLFT) is a pass/fail method that relies on the subject’s sensory response to detect a challenge agent (either sweet or bitter) to assess the adequacy of respirator fit.

Quantitative fit test (QNFT) is a test method that uses an instrument to assess the amount of leakage into the respirator in order to assess the adequacy of respirator fit.

- Most end-users choose QLFT because of the convenience, and price. QNFT is a longer procedure and only one person can be tested at a time, whereas with QLTF approximately 6 people can be tested at a time.
- Pregnant women or people who have asthma often choose QNFT as the preferred fit test method because there is no aerosol used.

## 8) How do I choose which N95 mask to order?

The models differ in style, fit and function, for example cup style versus flat fold, regular vs. smaller size, individually packaged vs. bulk box. Selection is made upon personal preference and most importantly fit of the respirator. No single respirator will fit all facial profiles. It is important to arrange a fit test for pharmacy staff prior to ordering the respirators.

## 9) How long can I wear an N95 mask?

According to Health Canada, there are no published data on the length of time the mask is effective for the wearer. Masks should be changed if they become wet, interfere with breathing, are damaged or visibly soiled. A mask which has been exposed to a probable Influenza-like-illness (ILI) is considered contaminated and should be discarded.

Respirators/masks are disposable but can be re-used repeatedly by the same healthcare worker (unless the healthcare worker was in contact with a suspect or probable ILI) if the respirators/masks are stored in a clean, dry location. Humidity, dirt, and crushing reduce the efficiency of the respirator.

***If re-using the mask:*** Place in clean, dry location such as a paper bag. Do not mark the mask with a pen or marker. Write your name on the outside of the paper bag to identify the mask as your own. Wash your hands after handling the mask.

## 10) Are there alternatives to wearing an N95 mask?

The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector recommends that surgical masks be used by healthcare workers in close proximity to patients with influenza-like-illness and N95 respirators be used only when performing aerosol-generating procedures. Ontario's plan (OHPIP 2008) is advising a higher level of protection, and exceeds the minimal requirements set by the federal government's plan.

If you cannot order a sufficient quantity of N95 respirators (for which you and your staff have been fit tested), you can wear a surgical mask and have patients with influenza-like-illness wear one as well.

**11) What is the difference between an N95 mask and surgical mask for infection control?**

Influenza is primarily spread through droplets and through contact of contaminated surfaces. N95 masks are 95% effective against non-oil aerosols with a particle size of 0.3 micrometers.

According to the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan, surgical masks covering the mouth and nose protect the mucous membrane from droplet particles larger than 0.5 micrometers generated from coughing, sneezing or talking.

**12) How long can I wear a surgical mask?**

According to the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector, in the early phase of an influenza pandemic it may be prudent from healthcare workers to wear surgical masks when interacting in close face-to-face contact with coughing individuals to minimize influenza transmission.

Surgical masks should be used only once and changed when wet (they are ineffective when wet). To wear them, they should cover both the mouth and the nose. Avoid touching the mask when wearing it.

**13) How do I discard a mask?**

According to Health Canada

***When discarding the mask:*** Wash your hands prior to handling the mask. Carefully remove your mask using the straps. Discard. Wash your hands after handling the mask.

**14) Where can I find more information on fit testing and ordering of personal protective equipment?**

For more information please visit [www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency/stockpiling](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/emergency/stockpiling) and send an expression of interest, a brief description of your organization/service and request for product Pricing Sheets to [emergencystockpiling.moh@ontario.ca](mailto:emergencystockpiling.moh@ontario.ca)

Pricing sheets provide further information on the products being offered and fit testing.