



YOU AND THE FLU

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

One of the most effective ways to protect you, your family and friends from influenza is to practice good personal hygiene.

Five simple ways to prevent the spread of pandemic influenza:

1. Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough

The flu virus can travel through the air when a person coughs or sneezes. When you cough or sneeze you should:

- Turn away from other people
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve
- Use disposable tissues rather than a handkerchief (which could store the virus)
- Put used tissues into the nearest bin, rather than a pocket or handbag
- Wash your hands, or use an alcohol hand rub, as soon as possible afterwards.

People who are sick should always be encouraged to wear a surgical mask to contain the virus and help prevent its spread.

2. Wash your hands

Washing your hands regularly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based product (gels, rinses, foams - available at supermarkets and pharmacies) that does not require water - even when they aren't visibly dirty - is effective in killing the flu virus.

Always wash your hands:

- after you've been to the toilet

- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- after being in contact with someone who has a cold or flu
- before touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- before preparing food and eating.



To wash your hands properly:



3. Don't share personal items

The flu virus can spread when someone touches an object with the virus on it and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth.

If a member of your household has the flu:

- keep personal items, such as towels, bedding and toothbrushes separate
- do not share eating and drinking utensils, food or drinks.

4. Clean surfaces

Flu viruses can live on surfaces for several hours. If a member of your household has the flu, you should regularly clean surfaces such as tables, benches, fridge doors and door knobs with soap and water or detergent.

5. Avoid close contact with others if you are unwell with flu

Keeping your distance from others by standing or sitting back (at least one metre apart, where possible) will help reduce the chances of spreading the flu virus between people.

While you are unwell you should remain at home and avoid going out in public. If you are unwell, you should not go to work or school or attend other public or crowded gatherings, and avoid taking public transport. If you need to use public transport, it is recommended that you wear a mask to contain the virus.

Do not visit people who have the flu unless it is absolutely necessary.

If a member of your household has the flu, he or she should be separated from other members of the family if possible, and be encouraged to wear a surgical mask. If you are caring for someone who has the flu, you too should wear a mask and gloves when in close contact to protect yourself from catching the flu.

THINGS TO DO:

- **Take simple analgesics such as paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief**, in doses as recommended on the package, to ease your muscle pain and bring down fever (unless your doctor says otherwise). **Children under 18 years of age should not take medications containing aspirin.** The combination of influenza and aspirin in children has been known to cause Reye's syndrome, a serious condition affecting the nervous system and liver. Your pharmacist can provide advice on appropriate 'over-the-counter' medications for reducing fever.
- **Gargle** with a glass of warm water to ease a sore throat. Sugarless lollies or lozenges may also help. Some medications, such as benzocaine, work by numbing the throat. They usually come in the form of a lozenge or throat spray. Others, containing substances like honey or herbs, work by coating the throat.
- A **cough** can be helpful if it gets rid of mucus. If a dry cough keeps you awake, a cough suppressant (antitussive) may be helpful. If you need help loosening mucus from the chest or lungs, an expectorant may help. You should not take a suppressant and an expectorant together. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the appropriate medication.
- **Nose drops or sprays** to help soothe or clear a blocked nose. Decongestants help shrink swollen blood vessels. There are two kinds of decongestants – pills and liquids. Liquids are nose drops or sprays that act in minutes, are more effective and have fewer side effects than pills. Liquids tend to work for only two to three days. If your nose is still stuffy after this you may have to switch to pills. Pills take about half an hour to work and may cause a dry mouth, sleep disturbances and other side effects. Pseudoephedrine is a decongestant in pill form but you should talk to your doctor or pharmacist about whether it is suitable for you.
- **Do not smoke.** Smoking is very irritating to airways that are already damaged by the virus.
- **Ask for help.** If you live alone, are a single parent, or are responsible for the care of someone who is frail or disabled, you may need to call someone to help you until you are feeling better. (see Preparing Your Household fact sheet)
- **Stay at home.** Avoid contact with others as much as possible and stay away from work or school while the infection is contagious. If possible, wear a mask when near other people.
- **Rest.** You will probably feel very weak and tired until your temperature returns to normal. Resting will provide comfort and allow your body to use its energy to fight the infection.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Extra fluids are needed to replace what you lose in sweating due to fever. If your urine is dark, you need to drink more. Try to drink a glass of water or juice, or an equal amount of some other fluid (not alcohol), every hour while you are awake.

- Older people are much more sensitive to medications in general and may experience more side effects, especially to the nervous system (e.g. confusion). If you have questions about medications, talk to your pharmacist.

MEDICATION

- **Talk to a doctor.** If you are sick during an outbreak it is advisable that in the first instance you contact your healthcare provider or hospital by phone rather than in person. This will help reduce the spread of infection.

- **Antiviral medications** – These medications are most effective if taken within the first 24-48 hours of infection and can be prescribed by your doctor. It is therefore important to seek medical attention early. Seek medical attention immediately **by phone** if you get sick.
- **Antibiotics** are not effective against influenza because it is a virus - and antibiotics fight bacteria. Your doctor may, however, prescribe them if you develop secondary bacterial infections (such as an ear infection) or complications (e.g. pneumonia).

For further information and advice contact the Workers Health Centre



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