

Managing in the Home

How to protect yourself and care for your family with the flu

If you or a family member becomes unwell with influenza you need to follow **5** important steps to stop the infection from spreading and to care for the sick persons.

1. Keep your hands clean

Wash and dry your hands carefully to stop germs from spreading. Repeat hand-washing before and after making hand-to-face contact or touching any item that may have germs on it, such as door handles.

- You can use plain liquid soap and water to wash your hands. **Wash** them for at least 20 seconds and then **dry** them thoroughly with a paper towel and **throw** it away.
- You can also use an alcohol-based hand rub (from your local chemist or supermarket). Apply enough to keep your hands moist for a minimum of 15 seconds (about ½ teaspoon). Put it on the palm of one hand and rub your hands together covering all surfaces until dry. Do not dry with a towel.
- Keep germs out of any cuts, grazes, or areas of broken skin. Use gloves if you can and cover these areas with a waterproof dressing.

2. Cover your coughs & sneezes

If you or members of your family are coughing or sneezing it is important to avoid close contact with other people.

- Remember to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and always put your used tissue into a rubbish tin.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Don't spit, and cover your mouth and nose when clearing your throat or nose.
- Always wash your hands after coughing or sneezing.

3. Don't get close to others

If you or members of your family have the flu you must all stay home from work and/or school. Discourage visitors from dropping in to see you and cancel any social gatherings your family has arranged. Although this may mean social isolation for you and your family, you will help prevent others from catching your illness.

Try to avoid activities such as shopping - if you need to be out in public keep your distance by:

- Standing at least 1 metre from people.
- Avoiding those who may be coughing or sneezing.
- Avoiding any physical contact with people where possible, e.g., handshaking, kissing, hugging.

4. Keep rooms well aired

Influenza can spread where there is not enough ventilation. Open your windows, or if you have an air conditioning system, make sure it is properly maintained.

5. Care for those who are sick

If someone in your family becomes sick **phone** your local doctor or practice nurse for **advice** on what to do. We need to keep doctors' waiting rooms flu-free.

A person with influenza could be sick for up to 2 weeks. Try to keep sick family members away from the rest of the family as much as possible, e.g. encourage them to stay in their own bedroom instead of spending time on the couch in the living room. If, however, more than one person becomes sick then they may share a room.

The main concerns are **dehydration** and **fever**.

Keep the person drinking:

They need up to 2 litres (20 cups) of fluid a day, even if they don't feel thirsty. The best drinks are cold drinks that contain a little sugar and electrolytes, such as:

- Electrolyte drinks: Enerlyte (from your chemist), Lucozade, and "sport" drinks.
- Home-made electrolyte drinks (see over).
- Soft drinks and fruit juice – but add plenty of cold water.
- For babies: breast milk.

Avoid drinks that contain alcohol and caffeine, or solids such as milk drinks or fruit juice with pulp in them – but any non-alcoholic drink is better than no drink – so let the sick person choose something they can manage.

Vomiting and/or diarrhoea make dehydration worse, so ensure they keep taking fluids, even it is only small sips often.

Signs they aren't getting enough to drink:

- Weakness and lethargy
- Dizziness when sitting or standing up
- Headache
- Dry mouth
- Dark-coloured urine

Important: If you are cannot assess the hydration state of your family member, or have concerns, please phone your general practice team for advice.

Home-made rehydration drinks:

Mix well, cover, and store in a cool place

Recipe One:

- 1 litre water
- 3 tablespoons sugar or honey
- ½ teaspoon salt

Recipe Two:

- 750 ml water
- 250 ml fruit juice
- 1 tablespoon sugar or honey
- ½ teaspoon salt

Check for fever:

Having a fever is uncomfortable and may prevent the patient from eating, drinking, or sleeping, so check their temperature regularly and aim to keep it as close to normal (37 degrees Celsius) as possible.

You should have a thermometer in your first aid kit. To avoid infecting another family member, it is best to take the temperature under the person's armpit. **Wipe** the thermometer with disinfectant between uses. You can also purchase single-use clinical thermometers from your local chemist.

The best medicine to treat fever, aches, and pains is paracetamol (or Panadol).

- **Adults:** take **one-two** 500 mg tablets every 4-6 hours
- **Children 6-12 years:** take **one** tablet every 4-6 hours
- **Children under 6:** discuss the correct dose of liquid paracetamol with your GP or practice nurse.

The maximum adult dose is eight tablets in any 24 hour period.

Cooling cares will also help to lower a temperature. Apply a cool (not cold) wet facecloth to the forehead.

Do not wrap up or warm someone who has a fever, is shaking or has the "chills" – if you do this their temperature may become dangerously high.

Feed those who are sick as appropriate:

People with flu will not feel like eating. Do not try to get them to eat; it is more important to ensure they are having enough fluids.

When they begin to feel better, offer different fluids, e.g., diluted fruit juice, clear or strained soups, sweetened tea, or jelly. Slowly introduce solids, e.g., dry white toast, water crackers, or pasta. Avoid anything that contains fats or oils. Add canned fruit and thicker soups (chicken soup) to the range of foods, and lastly introduce milk and other milk products, together with fruit, vegetables, breads and cereals.

Prevent the spread of influenza:

Clean surfaces and objects that have been touched by the sick person daily. Influenza viruses can live up to 48 hours on hard surfaces. This means wiping telephones, door handles and toilet and bathroom areas, etc with a disinfectant.

One of the most effective and cheapest disinfecting solutions to clean these surfaces is a solution of 1 teaspoon (5 ml) of bleach (such as Janola) to 500 ml of water.

Do not share items such as eating utensils and drink bottles with other members of the family and ensure dishes are washed using hot water either by hand or dishwasher.

When washing clothes and linen, use regular washing detergent and either hot or cold water in a normal machine wash, then hang linen on a clothes line. If linen is stained or contaminated with secretions then soak in a product such as Napisan and wash separately.

Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) in the home environment is not recommended. However, if you decide to use PPE :

- Ensure the sick person wears a surgical mask at all times to prevent or minimize the spread of the virus when coughing or sneezing and replace if they become wet or damaged.
- Dispose of used or damaged masks – put them into a plastic bag and then into the rubbish.
- If you are not sick do not use a mask (you will touch your face more often and increase your risk of infection).

- A disposable gown or apron is only required if you are at risk of splashing from the patient's bodily excretions or secretions, e.g., coughing, sneezing, or vomiting.
- Gloves are not necessary as long as you wash your hands before and after contact with a sick person. Single-use only gloves can be used if you are in contact with the patient's bodily excretions or secretions, wounds, or broken areas of skin. Discard all gloves into a rubbish bin after use.
- **Wash hands regularly** after any contact with the sick.

Keep a record of progress:

Note down the sick person's temperature, fluid intake, and symptoms. This can be used to monitor any improvement or deterioration and appropriate follow up advice.

Seek advice if you note any of the following:

- Shortness of breath.
- Pain in the chest.
- Confusion or disorientation.
- Coughing up bloody sputum.
- Vomiting that does not go away.
- Symptoms improve and then suddenly become worse.
- Dehydration not able to be corrected with oral fluids.