

Preventing the spread of flu

You can help stop yourself catching flu or spreading it to others with good hygiene measures.

Always wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water, as well as:

- Clean surfaces regularly, such as your computer keyboard, telephone and door handles to get rid of germs
- Using tissues to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Disposing of used tissues in a bin as soon as possible
- Do not go to work or school until you are better to avoid unnecessary contact with other people

The annual flu vaccine is the most effective way to help reduce the risk of becoming infected.



The influenza vaccine

An influenza vaccine is available for free to:

- Persons aged 55 years or older
- Children from the age of 6 months to 59 months
- Persons of any age suffering from - chronic respiratory disease, chronic heart disease, chronic liver disease, chronic kidney disease, Diabetes Mellitus, any chronic immunodeficiency state, including HIV or AIDS
- Persons residing in institutions
- Students attending Special Schools

The viruses that cause flu change every year. In order to remain protected you need to take the influenza vaccine every year.

For **more information** contact the
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate

on **2326 6000** or the
National Immunisation Centre
on **2568 0222/3/4.**

Seasonal Influenza



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Influenza Prevention

Influenza is a common infectious respiratory viral illness which can become quite severe in some cases. You can catch influenza or flu all the year round, but it is more common in winter. It is known as "seasonal influenza".

Flu is different from the common cold as it is caused by a different group of viruses. The symptoms usually start more suddenly, they are more severe and last longer. Cold-like symptoms, such as a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, and a sore throat, are also caused by flu, but are usually less severe than the other symptoms.

Flu can make you feel so exhausted and unwell that you have to stay in bed and rest until you feel better.

Flu can give you any of the following symptoms

- sudden fever - a temperature of 38°C or above
- dry, chesty cough
- headache
- tiredness and weakness
- chills
- aching muscles
- limb or joint pain
- diarrhoea or abdominal (tummy) pain (especially in children)
- nausea and vomiting
- sore throat
- runny or blocked nose
- sneezing
- loss of appetite
- difficulty in sleeping



Difference between a cold and the flu

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if you have influenza or just a cold, as the symptoms can be quite similar. The main differences are:

Flu symptoms:

- appear suddenly
- usually include fever and aching muscles
- make you feel too unwell to continue your usual activities

Cold symptoms:

- appear gradually
- mainly affect your nose and throat
- are fairly mild, so you can still get around and are usually well enough to go to work

If you are normally fit and healthy, there is usually no need to see a doctor if you have mild influenza-like symptoms. The best thing to do is to rest at home, keep warm and drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. If necessary you can take medication to lower a high temperature and relieve aches and pains. Do not go to work or school until you feel better. This usually takes about a week.



There are times when you would need to visit your GP. You should consider visiting your GP if:

- you are 65 years of age or over
- you are pregnant
- you have a long-term medical condition - such as diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, kidney disease or a neurological disease
- you have a weakened immune system - for example, if taking chemotherapy or have HIV
- you develop chest pain shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing, or start coughing up blood
- your symptoms are getting worse over time or have not improved after a week

In these situations, you may need medication to treat or prevent complications of flu. Your doctor may recommend taking medicine to reduce your symptoms and help you recover more quickly.

How do you catch flu?

The influenza virus is contained in the millions of tiny droplets that come out of the nose and mouth when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes. These droplets typically spread about one metre. They hang suspended in the air for a while before landing on surfaces, where the virus can survive for up to 24 hours.

Anyone who breathes in the droplets can catch flu. You can also catch the virus by touching the surfaces that the droplets have landed on if you pick up the virus on your hands and then touch your nose or mouth.

Everyday items at home and in public places can easily become contaminated with the flu virus, including food, door handles, remote controls, stair rails, telephones and computer keyboards. It is very important to wash your hands often.

You can catch flu many times, because flu viruses change regularly and your body will not have resistance to any new versions of the virus.