



Taking Care of Sick Persons in the Home Fact Sheet

The following guidelines should be followed when taking care of sick individuals in the home.

Home Isolation:

Unless necessary for medical care, persons with the flu should not leave the home when they have a fever or during the time that they are most likely to spread their infection to others - 7 days after onset of symptoms in adults, and 10 days after onset of symptoms in children.

Treating Flu Symptoms at Home:

- Over the counter cold and flu medications used according to the package instructions may help relieve some symptoms such as cough and congestion. However, these medications do not prevent a person from being contagious. Children younger than 2 years of age should not be given over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a healthcare provider. The safest way to care for flu symptoms in children younger than 2 years of age is by using a cool mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.
- **Don't** give aspirin to children or teenagers who have the flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome. Teenagers with the flu can take medicines without aspirin, such as Tylenol, Advil or Motrin, to relieve symptoms.
- Antiviral medications can sometime help lessen flu symptoms, but require a prescription. Most people do not need the antiviral medications to fully recover. However, persons at high risk for severe flu complications, or those with severe flu illness who require hospitalization, might benefit from antiviral medications. Ask your healthcare provider whether you need antiviral medications.
- Sick individuals should drink plenty of clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to prevent dehydration.

Preventing the Spread of Illness in the Home:

- Sick persons should be placed in a room separate from the common areas of the house. The door to the sick person's room should be kept closed if possible. It is advised that visits be limited to caregivers only.
- Sick persons should cover their mouths when coughing and sneezing, and wash their hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- If possible, the sick person should wear a face mask when in common areas of the house near other household members. When a face mask cannot be tolerated by the sick person, family members should consider wearing a face mask which will offer some degree of protection.
- If persons with the flu need to leave the home (i.e. for medical care), they should wear a face mask if possible.
- If possible, only one adult in the home should take care of the sick individual. Avoid having pregnant women care for the sick person. (Pregnant women are at increased risk of influenza-related complications and the body's ability to fight off infections can be less during pregnancy).
- Household members should avoid being face-to-face with the sick person and should avoid close contact (less than about 6 feet away) with the sick person as much as possible. If you must have close contact with the sick person (for example, hold a sick infant), spend the least amount of time possible in close contact and if possible, wear a face mask.
- All members of the household should frequently wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizer, including after every contact with the sick person's room or bathroom. Paper towels should be used for drying hands after hand washing or dedicate cloth towels to each person in the household. For example, have different colored towels for each person.
- Consideration should be given to maintaining good ventilation in shared household areas (e.g., keeping windows open in restrooms, kitchen, etc.).

Household Cleaning, Laundry, and Waste Disposal

- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in the trash. Wash your hands after touching used tissues and similar waste.
- Used facemasks should be taken off and placed in the trash so they don't touch anything else. Avoid re-using disposable facemasks if possible. If a reusable fabric facemask is used, it should be laundered with normal laundry detergent and tumble-dried in a hot dryer.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Wash linens (such as bed sheets and towels) by using household laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting. Avoid "hugging" laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating yourself. Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after handling dirty laundry.
- Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap.