

Seasonal cold and flu



The “common cold” is the most common reason that people miss work. There are at least 200 different strains of virus that cause colds. There’s no joy in having a cold, as we all know.

Cold and flu viruses are very contagious. They are airborne and therefore transmitted when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. They can also be spread when an infected person sneezes into their hand or blows their nose and then touches an object. These viruses can live for several hours on a surface like a computer keyboard, telephone, a doorknob or a toy in a doctor’s waiting room. That’s why the flu spreads rapidly anywhere people congregate, including schools, childcare centres, nursing homes, buses, offices and other workplaces.

You can spread the flu even a day or two before you feel sick. Adults can continue to pass the virus to others for another three to seven days after symptoms start. You can also be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms and during this time, you can still spread the virus to others.

Here are some guidelines to help you get through the seasonal cold and flu:

- Stay at home for a few days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free, whichever is longer. (Refer to your company policy for prescribed sick leave).
- Rest, keep hydrated and warm. Drink clear fluids such as water, sports drinks, broths or electrolyte beverages for infants.
- Have everyone in the household wash their hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand cleaners can also be used.

- Keep surfaces clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant, as per usage instructions of the product. Thoroughly wash linens, eating utensils and dishes used by those who are sick before reusing.
- Dispose of all used tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in a waste bin. Wash your hands after touching tissues or similar waste.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you don’t have a tissue handy, use the upper part of your sleeve. Wash your hands as soon as you can after coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Your hands have touched many surfaces which may or may not have been contaminated.
- Adults can take medications for symptom relief as needed for pain and fever such as paracetamol. If in doubt about what to take, contact your health-care provider.
- Refrain from giving children under the age of 4 years over-the-counter cold medications without first consulting a health-care provider.

In addition to the above, to prevent flu each year, you may want to consider having a flu vaccination. No vaccine is 100 per cent effective, however studies have shown the flu vaccine to be 70 - 90 per cent effective in preventing the illness. It does not prevent you catching the common cold.