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| You never forget the flu |
| Key messages - what you should know about influenza  |

### Use these key messages to help spread the word about the flu and prevention to your network.

You never forget the flu, it can hit quickly and last for a few weeks, meaning time off work or school and staying away from family and friends.

For vulnerable Victorians, like children, the elderly and people with a chronic condition or weakened immune system, the flu can have serious and devastating outcomes. That’s why it’s so important everyone knows how to stop the spread of flu.

## What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza isn’t like the common cold; it is a highly contagious viral infection that can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications, including pneumonia.

The flu virus is found in almost invisible little droplets from saliva, sneezes, coughs and runny noses. The virus can travel up to two metres and live on surfaces for up to 48 hours and is spread when people touch an infected surface.

## What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of the flu are the sudden appearance of a high fever (38°C or more), a dry cough, body aches (especially in the head, lower back and legs) and feeling extremely weak and tired (and not wanting to get out of bed).

Symptoms of the flu hit very quickly and may last for weeks. A bout of the flu typically follows this pattern:

* + Days 1–3: Sudden appearance of fever, headache, muscle pain and weakness, dry cough, sore throat and sometimes a stuffy nose.
	+ Day 4: Fever and muscle aches decrease. Hoarse, dry or sore throat, cough and possible mild chest discomfort become more noticeable. You may feel tired or flat.
	+ Day 8: Symptoms usually improve. Cough and tiredness may last one to two weeks or more.

The flu doesn’t discriminate, and anyone can be affected, that’s why it is so important that everyone in the community protects themselves against the flu this season and takes some easy steps to help stop the spread of the flu.

## Can the flu illness be treated?

The best things you can do to look after yourself if you have the flu are:

* **Rest –** you will probably feel very weak and tired until your temperature returns to normal (about three days) and resting will provide comfort and allow your body to use its energy to fight the infection.
* **Stay at home –** stay away from work or school and avoid contact with others as much as possible while the infection is contagious. The period during which adults are contagious is usually around 3–5 days from when the first symptoms appear, and up to 7 days in younger children.
* **Drink plenty of fluids –** extra fluids are needed to replace those lost because of the fever (through sweating). If your urine is dark, you need to drink more. Try to drink a glass of fluids, such as water, every hour while you are awake.

There are prescription medications called “antiviral drugs” that can be used to treat flu illness. Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter. You can only get them if you have a prescription from a health care provider. Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics, which fight against bacterial infections.

Check with your health care provider promptly if you are at high risk of serious flu complications and you get flu symptoms.

## How can I help stop the spread of flu?

Hands are one of the top spreaders of germs and viruses, including the flu virus. Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and water at regular intervals throughout the day is a quick and easy way to help stop the spread of flu causing germs.

If you don’t have a tissue handy and you feel a sneeze or cough coming on, cough or sneeze into your elbow. It stops your hands getting covered in the flu virus, so it will help stop the spread of those nasty germs. If you do use a tissue, make sure you dispose of it into a bin nearby and then wash your hands thoroughly.

Most adults can infect others up to seven days after becoming sick, so the best way to avoid spreading the flu is to stay at home while you are unwell. Avoid going to work or school or visiting busy public places and vulnerable people, such as the elderly.

If you do get the flu, the best things you can do to look after yourself are to rest, stay at home and drink plenty of fluids.

If you do need to see a GP for your symptoms, make sure you call ahead first so they can make sure there’s no one in an at-risk group around when you have your appointment.

### Helping stop the spread of flu is as simple as following three simple steps: cough or sneeze into your elbow, wash your hands thoroughly and if you’re unwell, stay home.

## Are you helping fight flu?

Are you in the flu fighting business, or know someone else who is? Share your own flu fighting profiles online or social media. Here’s how:

1. Snap a photo showing your work as a flu fighter.
2. Write a post about how you fight flu.
3. Share the image and message on social media!

Be sure to include the hashtag **#FightFlu** and tag [**@VicGovDHHS**](https://twitter.com/VicGovDHHS) in your post!

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