

What should I do if someone in my family gets the flu?

Most patients with influenza (seasonal, pandemic, or avian) will be able to remain at home during the course of their illness and can be cared for by family members or others who live in the household. Anyone who has been in the household with an influenza patient is also at risk for developing influenza in the following several days. Limiting the spread of influenza within and outside the home becomes very important.

Influenza patients in the home

- Physically separate the patient with influenza from non-ill persons living in the home as much as possible.
- Patients should not leave the home during the period when they are most likely to be infectious to others (i.e. 5 days after onset of symptoms). When movement outside the home is necessary (e.g. for medical care), the patient should cover the mouth and the nose when coughing/sneezing, and should wear a mask.

Other persons in the home

- Persons who have not been exposed to influenza, and who are not essential for taking care of the patient or others in the home, should not enter the home while persons are still having a fever due to influenza.
- If unexposed persons must enter the home, they should avoid close contact with the patient.
- Persons living in the home with the patient with pandemic influenza should limit contact with the patients to the extent possible; consider choosing one person to be the primary person caring for the influenza patient.
- Household members should be extremely aware of the development of any symptoms of influenza in themselves.

Infection Control Measures in the home

- All persons in the household should carefully follow recommendations for hand washing, or use of an alcohol-based hand rub, after contact with an influenza patient or with the environment in which the patient is receiving care (e.g. their bedroom).
- Although no studies have assessed the use of masks at home to decrease the spread of infection, using a surgical mask by the patient or the caregiver during their interaction may be beneficial.
- Dirty dishes and eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with warm water and soap. Separation of eating utensils for use by a patient with influenza is not necessary.
- Laundry may be washed in a standard washing machine with warm/cold water and detergent. It is not necessary to separate dirty laundry used by a patient with influenza from other laundry. Care should be used when handling dirty laundry, though, to avoid self-contamination. Wash hands after handling dirty laundry.
- Tissue used by the ill patient should be placed in a bag and disposed of with other household waste. Consider placing a bag at the bedside for this purpose.