

# How to avoid the spread of flu

**influenza – or ‘flu’** – is caused by a virus which infects the respiratory system (nose, throat, bronchi and sometimes lungs). It is spread from person to person via droplets from the coughs and sneezes of an infected persons or by indirect contact. The disease can last for over a week and can cause anything from only few symptoms to serious illness. Older people and those with other chronic diseases are especially at risk.

**Symptoms include:** a sudden onset of high fever, muscle pain, headache and general discomfort. Other symptoms can include tiredness coughing, sneezing, congestion and irritation in the nose, eyes, throat and ears.

## 01 Wash your hands regularly [and especially before eating]

Washing hands protects against both direct and indirect contact with the flu virus. Direct contact involves, for example, shaking hands with an infected person who has touched his mouth or nose, or who has used his hand to cover a cough or sneeze. Indirect contact involves touching, for example, a doorknob, tap, or discarded tissue handled by an infected person.

## 02 Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze

Droplets travel only a short distance and hence those most at risk of getting infected are those in close proximity (within a metre) to infected persons who are coughing and sneezing without covering their mouth and nose. Covering your mouth and nose will help to prevent transmission.

## 03 Dispose of tissues properly

Since the influenza virus can temporarily survive outside the body, transmission can also occur from freshly contaminated inanimate objects, such as handkerchiefs and tissues or by hand to hand contact. People who have direct or indirect contact with respiratory secretions are therefore at risk of getting the flu, for example when an individual comes into contact with a tissue recently used by an infected person.

## 04 If you do not have a tissue available, cover your mouth and nose

If you do not have a tissue, sneezing into your hands and immediately washing them afterwards or into your upper arm helps to prevent the virus from spreading.

## 05 Stay at home when you are ill

Individuals are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms and, although they can continue to emit viruses for up to five days after the onset of symptoms (7 days in children), the amount of viruses emitted, and hence the risk of infection drops steadily. It is advisable to stay at home as soon as you begin to develop symptoms. If you're getting worse, seek medical attention.

