# Preventing influenza and other respiratory infections

Infections that affect the nose, ears and throat, such as the flu and common cold are easily spread from one person to another.

Follow these 5 simple steps to avoid getting sick and spreading these infections to others.

## 1. Wash your hands

Keeping your hands clean is the best way to stop the spread of germs that cause respiratory infections. Make sure you wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand rub to keep your hands clean throughout the day.

Read more about why hand washing is important and how to wash your hands properly.

## 2. Be careful not to spread germs when coughing or sneezing

Because germs are commonly spread in the air, it is important that you use disposable tissues rather than your hands or a handkerchief when you cough or sneeze.

If you have the flu or a cold make sure you always:

> cough or sneeze into a tissue or use your inner elbow, covering your nose and mouth

> put the tissue into a closed-top bin as soon as possible

> wash your hands with soap and warm water, or use alcohol-based liquids, gels or wipes.

**Remember, hand washing is the best way to reduce the spread of germs that cause respiratory disease.**

## 3. Keep surfaces clean

Clean your home and work surfaces regularly to help get rid of germs, this includes:

> keyboards

> phones

> door handles

> children's toys.

You can use warm water and detergent to do this. Avoid using antibacterial cleansers (disinfectants) as these can make germs resistance to them.

## 4. Stand or sit away from others

A very simple way to reduce the spread of germs is to stand or sit away from people when you or they are coughing or sneezing. You should try to keep a distance of 1 metre (an arm's length).

## 5. Know what to do if you are sick

Flu and other respiratory infections can be very serious for older people, young children, pregnant women, or people of any age who have a chronic medical condition. When you are sick it is important to avoid crowded areas and stay away from these high risk groups.

Remember to protect yourself and others by getting vaccinated against the flu.

Expectant mothers can also find out more about flu vaccine in pregnancy.

## Where to get help

> See your doctor

> Visit a GP after hours

> Visit _healthdirect_ (external site) or call 1800 022 222

## Remember

- The flu and common colds are respiratory infections caused by germs.

- Germs are spread through the air and on surfaces.

- Follow the 5 simple steps to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others.

- Protect yourself and others by getting vaccinated against the flu.

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## See also

- Immunisation

- Childhood immunisation

- Childhood immunisation schedule

- Common cold

- Facts about hand hygiene

- Flu (influenza)

- Vaccination safety

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