

Tips on how to stop the spread of flu germs

Yes, right now it is January here in South Africa and the height of summer, but in a few months we will be into winter - and that means flu. Doctors at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Centre in the US have some tips on how children (and adults) can be protected from influenza.

The flu is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by a variety of strains of influenza viruses. While the flu typically causes mild symptoms, it can be severe enough to cause hospitalisation or even death. Flu most commonly occurs in the winter and early spring.

While the best way to prevent the seasonal flu is to get vaccinated, Cincinnati Children's doctors and the American Academy of Paediatrics give the following tips on how to stop the spread of flu germs:

- Cough and sneeze into a tissue. If you don't have time to get a tissue, bend your arm and sneeze or cough into it. Teach your children to do the same.
- Use tissues for wiping runny noses and catching sneezes. Throw the tissues in the trash after each use. Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing frequently.
- Avoid kissing your child on or around the mouth or face when either of you are ill.
- Make sure everyone washes their hands before and after coming into close contact with someone with the flu. Everyone should wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds (about as long as one verse of Happy Birthday). You may also use a waterless hand cleaner in addition to hand washing or if soap and water are not available.
- Don't let children share pacifiers, cups, spoons, forks, washcloths, or towels. Never share toothbrushes.
- Wash dishes, forks, cups and spoons in hot, soapy water or the dishwasher.
- Change cloth towels often and wash them in hot water.
- Wipe all surfaces, including toys, with a disinfectant or soap and hot water.
- Viruses can live for more than 30 minutes on doorknobs, toilet handles, countertops, and even toys.
- Keep children, particularly infants, away from second-hand tobacco smoke. Children who are exposed to tobacco smoke have an increased risk for respiratory illness.

Source: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Centre