

FLU FACTS

- > The flu isn't like the common cold, 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.
- > Victoria experienced an unusually long and serious flu season in 2017, with more than 48,000 confirmed cases of influenza, record demand on hospitals and tragically a number of deaths.
- > The flu is a highly contagious viral infection that can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications, including pneumonia. 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).
- > Each year the flu affects thousands of Victorians and puts an enormous amount of pressure on our hospitals and health system. Over 3,500 avoidable deaths occur in Australia every year from complications of seasonal flu, including pneumonia.
- > 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 by getting their flu shot.
- > 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.

ABOUT THE FLU SHOT

- > Your best defence against the flu is with the flu shot. Everyone should get an annual flu shot anytime from mid-April onwards to be protected for the peak of flu season, which is generally June to September. However, it's never too late to be vaccinated as the flu can spread all year round.
- > The flu shot changes every year to match different strains of the flu that are circulating. Even if you had the flu shot last year, it's important that you get it every year to make sure you're protected for when flu season hits.
- > The flu shot is safe and effective and doesn't contain any live virus so it can't give you the flu.
- > Think you're fit and healthy and never get the flu? The flu doesn't discriminate, anyone can get the flu. The flu is spread by contact with fluids from coughs and sneezes that contain the flu virus. The flu virus can live on any surface for almost 48 hours. Your best possible protection is with the flu shot.

PREVENTION

- > The flu virus is found in almost invisible little droplets from saliva, sneezes, coughs and runny noses. The virus can live on surfaces for hours, and is spread when people touch the infected surface. But stopping the spread of flu is as simple as following three simple steps: cough or sneeze into your elbow, wash your hands thoroughly and get your flu shot. If you're really unwell, avoid going to work or school or visiting busy public places.
- > 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.
- > 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.
- > 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. In particular, avoid going to work or school or visiting busy public places and vulnerable people, such as the elderly.
- > 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.