

Security Spotlight

An informational Guide for Securitas Canada Clients and Employees



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How to Protect Yourself Against Infections



Recent epidemics around the world have been a warning sign about how quickly infectious disease can spread in modern societies. The ease and speed with which people can move in today's world has greatly increased the chances for an exotic disease to spread multi-nationally.

Fortunately, many of the terrible diseases in the world are not easily transmitted. They require close contact with an infected person's bodily fluids for the disease to migrate from one person to another. A greater threat is a disease that mutates rapidly and can be spread through the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs. One such illness that is of great concern is the common flu.

The flu might not seem like such a scary sickness, given the horrific reports of the effects of other diseases, but the flu can be a worse threat due to the ease with which it is transmitted. Past outbreaks of the flu have killed millions, such as the outbreak in the 1918-1919 flu season which caused somewhere between 50 and 100 million deaths throughout the world.

Unlike some diseases, which require a specific climate in which to thrive, a flu epidemic can begin anywhere in the world. The Government of Canada puts out weekly influenza reports (fluwatch). *FluWatch* is Canada's national surveillance system that monitors the spread of flu and flu-like illnesses on an on-going basis. Pediatric hospitalizations reported by the IMPACT network continue to substantially increase, reaching 94 hospitalizations in February. Young/middle age adults are accounting for an increasing proportion of hospitalizations and laboratory confirmed cases as reported by participating provinces and territories. Unlike other infrequent diseases, **a flu epidemic will occur each and every year.**

Happily, modern medical science has given us the knowledge and the weapons we need to conduct a successful battle against the influenza infection. It is possible to have a year in which the entire world is free of infection by the flu, but only if we all work together and use the knowledge we have been given to prevent the virus from infecting us.

One of the most potent weapons we have against the virus is the flu vaccine that is formulated every year to prevent infection. Due to the rapid rate of mutation in the virus genome, the a new vaccine is created each year. The shot you got last year will not protect you from this year's version of the virus. You must get a new flu vaccination each and every year. Millions of people contract the flu every year. If a higher percent of the population had been vaccinated then there would have been much fewer illnesses and subsequent hospitalizations due to the flu.

The flu season generally runs from early October to May. So, the best time to get a vaccination is in late September or early October as it can take up to two weeks for your body to develop the antibodies that will help protect you from the flu virus. Vaccination is your best defense against the virus, but it is not foolproof protection.

Fortunately, it is not the only weapon in your arsenal. Here are some other recommended tips that can help you to squash the flu bug before it bites.

- First, know the symptoms of the flu, which are a sudden onset of high fever, cough (usually dry), headache, muscle and joint pain, severe malaise (feeling unwell), sore throat, and runny nose.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are sick, keep your distance from others to prevent spreading your illness. You can be infectious for five to seven days after symptoms appear. Young children and people with weakened immune systems might be contagious for longer periods.
- Stay home when you are sick. The rest will help you recover and isolation prevents spreading the illness.

- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Sneezing and coughing both release fine, mist like particles of mucus and saliva into the air. These particles can be inhaled by other people. They can also land on exposed surfaces. If a healthy person comes in contact with the contamination and then touches their mouth or nose they can contract the illness.
- Use a disposable tissue when you sneeze or cough. Do not leave the tissue lying around. Put it in a waste receptacle or a bag immediately after using the tissue.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. This practice can help prevent the entry of germs and viruses into your body and can help prevent you spreading germs and viruses if you are infected.
- Maintain your body's ability to fight against infection by getting plenty of sleep, keeping physically fit, reducing your stress, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating nutritious food.
- Wash your hands often to remove any traces of the virus. Hand washing must be done properly to be effective. It is recommended that you wash as follows:
 - **Wet** your hands with clean, running water and then apply soap.
 - **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands between your fingers, and under your nails.
 - **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
 - **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
 - **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, especially when someone is ill. Studies have shown that the flu virus can live for two to eight hours after being deposited on a surface.

If you get infected, there are treatments that can lessen the severity of the illness. For some people, the illness may not be severe and will pass in a couple of weeks, but it is important to remember that **the flu can be deadly**. If you suspect you have it, see your doctor right away. The doctor can treat you with antiviral drugs to promote your recovery and help prevent serious flu-related complications, like pneumonia.

Flu symptoms may not seem as horrifying as some more exotic illnesses, but you should not underestimate the seriousness of the flu threat. However, it is a manageable threat, if we all work together. Do your part to swat the flu bug today, by getting vaccinated and washing your hands.

Infect Yourself With Knowledge!

For more information about the influenza virus and how to protect yourself, check out these informative websites.

- Government of Canada, Diseases and Conditions
<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/flu-grippe/index-eng.php>
- Government of Canada, Public Health Reminder: Seasonal Flu
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/phn-asp/2015/flu-grippe-1027-eng.php>