

Infection Prevention and You



How to be a good visitor during flu season

Keeping your loved ones healthy during their healthcare stay is a priority. If you're visiting a friend or family member, it's important to be a good visitor and employ the basic principles of infection prevention. This is especially true during flu season.

According to the CDC, influenza (the flu) is a serious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses, which can cause mild to severe illnesses. Seasonal influenza activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May. The flu is associated with approximately 200,000 hospital admissions, and as many as 49,000 deaths annually in the United States. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine.

In order to prevent the spread of the flu and other illnesses, most healthcare facilities have policies in place that limit visitors during the flu season. Often times, these policies prohibit visitors who are 12 years of age and younger. This is because children often carry viruses without exhibiting any signs or symptoms of illness.

Who is vulnerable to illness?

Although everyone is a healthcare patient at one point or another in their lives, some are at a higher risk of getting sick when they're exposed to illness, including:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People who are immunocompromised such as those with HIV, hepatitis, and cancer
- Pregnant women
- People who live with, or care for, the immunocompromised or elderly
- People who have chronic medical conditions such as, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease

How do you prevent the spread of illness?

There are a few simple things you can do to prevent spreading viruses to others. Always follow these steps when you are visiting a healthcare facility:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands often—especially before entering and after exiting the hospital room.
- Use soap and water to wash your hands or an alcohol-based hand rub to disinfect your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Get your flu shot. The best way to prevent the flu and spreading illness is by getting vaccinated each year.

Infection Prevention and You

When you are not feeling well, it is best that you and your loved ones avoid close contact with people who are sick. This means that you should stay home when you are sick. Do not visit anyone in healthcare facilities if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or congested nose
- Body aches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Diarrhea

What are transmission-based precautions?

If the person you are visiting is on transmission-based precautions (e.g., contact, droplet, or airborne isolation), talk to the nurse before entering the room to find out what steps you will have to take—such as wearing a mask, a gown, and/or gloves. In many different healthcare settings, transmission-based precautions are used to help stop the spread of germs from one person to another. The goal is to protect patients, their families, other visitors, and healthcare workers—and stop germs from spreading across a healthcare setting.

Additional resources

- The CDC—About Flu <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/index.html>
- The CDC—Get Vaccinated <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/vaccinations.htm>
- APIC—Be a good visitor <http://professionals.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/be-a-good-visitor/>
- APIC—How to be a good visitor at a nursing home <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=how-to-be-a-good-visitor-at-a-nursing-home>
- APIC—Why should I get a flu shot? <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=why-should-i-get-a-flu-shot>
- APIC—What are Transmission-Based Precautions <http://professionals.site.apic.org/what-are-transmission-precautions/>

Updated: 11/20/2017