



# How to Care for Flu Patients Without Getting Sick

Expert  
Reviewed

Three Methods: [Preventing Transmission of The Flu Virus](#) [Staying Separate As Much As Possible](#) [Understanding How The Flu Virus Is Spread](#)

If you are caring for a person with the flu and want to avoid getting sick, it is important to practice preventative strategies. With careful hand washing, keeping space between yourself and the infected person, and cleaning and disinfecting any shared surfaces, among other strategies, you can greatly decrease your chances of catching the flu.

Method  
1

## Preventing Transmission of The Flu Virus

**1 Wash your hands regularly.**<sup>[1]</sup> If you are caring for someone with the flu and want to avoid catching it yourself, one of the key things to do is to wash your hands regularly. This helps to prevent any germs you may have picked up on your hands (from touching contaminated surfaces) from infecting you.

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for 30 seconds before eating, and after touching surfaces that may have been shared with the sick person (and that may therefore be contaminated with germs).
- If it is challenging for you to wash your hands with soap and water, another option is to carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with you. For instance, if you work in a healthcare facility, this may be your most convenient option as you will be around sick people all day every day.

**2 Clean and disinfect any frequently touched surfaces.**<sup>[2]</sup> If you are living with and caring for someone with the flu, it is important to clean and disinfect commonly touched areas such as doorknobs, countertops, and kitchen appliances regularly. If the infected person is in a care facility and you work there, the cleaning will be taken care of by janitors and other staff.

- Common disinfectants include a bleach-water solution (add 1/2 cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water), detergents, Lysol, or alcohol-based cleaning solutions.<sup>[3]</sup>

**3 Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue.**<sup>[4]</sup> The number one way in which the flu virus is spread is through respiratory droplets, which can be passed from one person to another if someone coughs or sneezes within 6 feet of you, or even if they talk while close to you. It is for this reason that it is important to ask the sick person to cover all coughs and sneezes with a tissue, so that the droplets do not spread as far in the air. Also, using a tissue is better than the person using their hand; if they use that hand the germs can then be passed onto any surfaces touched thereafter.

Method  
2

## Staying Separate As Much As Possible

**1 Stay in separate areas of the house whenever possible.**<sup>[5]</sup> Because your likelihood of catching the flu virus increases in direct proportion to your proximity to an infected person (as well as to the amount of time spent with the infected person), you will want to stay separate as much as possible. If your intimate partner is ill, sleeping in separate bedrooms (if you have a guest room) is ideal until the person recovers. If this is not possible, avoid cuddling and kissing and stay on your separate sides of the bed until the virus subsides.

- If you have two or more bathrooms in your home, use separate bathrooms (and separate towels) until the person recovers. This will help to prevent the spread of germs, and will minimize your risk of catching the flu.
- Select a chair for the infected person in the living room, so that you can avoid sitting in a chair that is contaminated with infectious germs.

**2 Use separate linens, dishes, and eating utensils.**<sup>[6]</sup> It may sound obvious, but because the flu virus can be transmitted from germs on surfaces, and also from droplets, you will want to avoid sharing linens, dishes, and eating utensils with the infected person.

**3 Have the infected person stay home from work, so as not to infect others.**<sup>[7]</sup> In addition to the fact that you are trying to protect yourself from catching the flu virus, you also don't want others in the community catching the illness if it can be avoided. For this reason, if the ill person can afford time off work (if they are granted sick days from their boss), now would be the time to take them. The infected person's co-workers will be grateful to not be exposed to infectious germs.

- Another option, depending upon the type of work that the person does, is to work from home until the virus subsides. This way, others are not at risk of catching the infection.

**4 Ensure the sick person is getting what they need to recover.** Offer them plenty of fluids, encourage lots of rest, and offer tissues and hand sanitizer to the infected person as needed. You can also help out by cooking meals for him or her, and looking after household duties until the affected person recovers.

### Method 3

## Understanding How The Flu Virus Is Spread

**1 Understand that the easiest way for the flu virus to be transmitted is via respiratory droplets.**<sup>[8]</sup> If a person coughs or sneezes near you, if they talk within close proximity to you, or if an intimate partner kisses you, you will be at high risk of catching the virus. This is why it is important to keep space between you and an infected person, and to have them cover all coughs and sneezes with a tissue to prevent germ transmission.

**2 Know that the flu can also be transmitted via contaminated objects and surfaces.**<sup>[9]</sup> A less common (but still possible) way for the flu to be transmitted is by touching something after an infected person has touched it, and picking up the germs that way. The virus can live on surfaces for up to 24 hours. This is why cleaning and disinfecting shared surfaces is so important, as well as having separate linens, towels, and eating utensils.

**3 Be aware that you can catch the flu even before the infected person shows symptoms.**<sup>[10]</sup> Many people do not realize that they are contagious one day before the onset of symptoms. Before they even realize they are sick with the flu, they could be inadvertently passing the infection onto others.

- The flu virus is contagious one day before the onset of symptoms, and up to seven days following the onset of symptoms.
- This is one of the many reasons why it is always important to wash your hands thoroughly — not just when someone is sick or during flu season, but always.
- Getting enough sleep every night, staying hydrated, and eating healthy are all ways to keep your body and immune system healthy so you will be less likely to catch the flu from someone.

## Tips

- Keep in mind that if a person does not ensure their own health, they can not care for others. Take every precaution to keep yourself healthy so you can care for the patient.

## Sources and Citations

1. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/20/caring-flu-patient-prevention-tips\\_n\\_2505000.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/20/caring-flu-patient-prevention-tips_n_2505000.html)
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