

'Flu – The facts

What is 'flu?

Most 'flu in the UK is caused by the *Influenza A* virus which infects the respiratory tract in humans. Although, 'flu tends to be seasonal and peaks between December and March, people can suffer from 'flu at any time. There are also many types of 'flu viruses and as they are constantly evolving, immunity from previous infections gives little protection.

How does 'flu spread?

'Flu germs infect people via the eyes, nose and mouth. 'Flu can spread in the home from an ill person in droplets expelled when they cough or sneeze. These may be breathed in and cause infection in people standing close by, or they may settle on surrounding surfaces and items. Ill people can also leave mucus and nasal secretions on surfaces, tissues, fabrics etc via their hands. Other people can then become infected by touching contaminated hands, surfaces, etc and putting their hands to their eyes, nose or mouth so good hand and surface hygiene can help minimise spread. Remember, respiratory bugs like 'flu can also be spread by people who do not show any symptoms and so regular hygiene routines are necessary.

What are the symptoms?

The following symptoms are typical of 'flu which in severe cases can also progress to cause bronchitis or bacterial pneumonia. 'Flu can last up to 7 days and being caused by a virus does not respond to antibiotic treatment:

- Sudden fever
- Aching limbs and fatigue
- Sore throat
- Cough

And in some instances, symptoms can include:

- Runny nose
- Eye pains and a sensitivity to light

Who's at risk?

Anyone can be infected with 'flu, but the young, the elderly and others with reduced immunity are particularly vulnerable and may be eligible for vaccination.

How to help prevent 'flu spreading:

- People should cover their mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing as 'flu can spread by the expelled droplets. Hands must be washed afterwards.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and wash your hands frequently. If you have to touch your face, wash your hands first or use an alcohol handrub.
- Hygienically clean surfaces and items around the house that are frequently touched by different people (e.g. bathroom and bedside items, taps, handles, doorknobs, switches) with a bleach based solution like Domestos bleach cleaning spray.
- Use disposable tissues which should then be disposed of in plastic bags tied at the neck. Remember hands may become contaminated.
- Both ill people and carers should wash their hands regularly.
- An ill person should not share towels, face cloths etc with others. The ill person's laundry and bedlinen should be kept and washed separately.
- Where possible, ill people should stay in their own room and avoid contact with those who may be more vulnerable to infection such as the young and the elderly.
- Keep your home well ventilated. Carers should minimise the time spent in the patient's room.
- Cleaning cloths can spread 'flu germs. Disinfect them by soaking in bleach overnight and thoroughly dry them.

Unlike other household cleaning products, bleach kills all known germs including bacteria, fungi and viruses such as 'flu