Influenza Outbreak - Public Health Advice

A highly contagious strain of influenza virus ("the flu") has spread throughout the Cocos (Keeling) Islands community, infecting a large number of residents. Whilst the outbreak is confined to Cocos at this stage, the virus may spread to Christmas Island.

There is no medical cure for the flu. Affected residents should remain at home and treat symptoms with rest, plenty of water and Panadol for fevers if required. Symptoms of the flu include:

- Chills, shivering and fever (temperature over 38 degrees Celsius)
- Headache/ Muscle aches and pains
- Sore throat and/ or Dry cough
- Stuffy or runny nose/ Sneezing
- Tiredness
- Trouble breathing

The IOT Health Service has closed the West and Home Island Clinics in an effort to prevent further spreading of the virus. Residents who are experiencing symptoms outside of those listed above, have chronic health concerns or who need medical attention can still call the Clinics. The nurses will assess the symptoms and see patients if necessary. Christmas Island Hospital has sent additional equipment and staff to support Cocos, which may affect some appointments throughout the next week. Patients will be contacted and advised if this is the case.

Residents who are caring for those with the flu should take precautions to prevent contracting the virus themselves, ensuring you keep your distance from infected friends and family, and washing your hands regularly.

It is acknowledged that Friday 1 September 2017 is Hari Raya Haji, and that many people will gather to observe religious worship. If you are unwell, you are urged to stay at home. If you must attend, please use the antibacterial hand wash provided, cover your mouth when coughing and consider using a face mask.

The WA Department of Health has advised no additional community quarantine measures are required at this time. Residents should read the attached pamphlet "The Flu and You" for further information on influenza and how to avoid contracting or sharing the virus.

Leon Mills
Director
IOTA
What are the symptoms of influenza?

- Chills, shivering and fever (temperature over 38 degrees Celsius)
- Headache
- Muscle aches and pains
- Sore throat
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Sneezing
- Dry cough
- Tiredness
- Trouble breathing

If you experience any of these symptoms, you should avoid contact with other people wherever possible. If you are concerned about your symptoms, or they become worse, you should seek medical advice immediately. It is especially important to get medical advice early in the course of illness in children, and in people who have certain chronic medical conditions. Your doctor will be able to advise if you have a chronic condition which puts you at particular risk of the complications of influenza.

Never give aspirin, or medications containing aspirin, to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever, without first speaking to your doctor. Paracetamol should be used as an alternative to reduce fever.

Remember, while cold and flu medications may relieve the symptoms, you are still capable of passing on the infection and should avoid contact with other people.

Why should I worry about the flu?

Although most people recover from the flu quickly, some people such as young children, older people and people with certain health conditions can be seriously affected by the flu, which can sometimes even result in death.

Flu vaccination can be administered to anyone who wishes to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza. Annual vaccination is recommended for people who are at increased risk of flu related complications, including all people 65 years and older. The flu vaccine is free for all Australians aged 65 and older. Free flu vaccine is also available for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 50 years and over, or aged 15 to 49 years with specific risk factors.

If you are concerned that you may be at risk please consult your GP or ask your pharmacist.

Further Information:

For further information on influenza visit the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing’s website at www.health.gov.au/fluandyou or freecall 1800 004 599
One of the most effective ways to protect you, your friends and family from influenza (the flu) is to practise good personal hygiene.

This brochure provides information on how simple practices like washing your hands regularly, covering coughs and sneezes, not sharing personal items, cleaning surfaces around your home and work, and staying at home if unwell can prevent the spread of the flu.

Five simple ways to prevent the spread of influenza

1. Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough
The flu virus can travel through the air when a person coughs or sneezes. When you cough or sneeze you should turn away from other people and, where possible, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve. Remember to wash your hands as soon as possible afterwards.

Where possible, use disposable tissues rather than a handkerchief, which could store the virus, and always put the used tissue into the nearest bin, rather than a pocket or handbag.

2. Wash your hands
Washing your hands regularly even when they aren’t visibly dirty is the single most effective way of killing the flu virus. Alcohol based hand products are an alternative to soap and water.

Always wash your hands:
• after you’ve been to the toilet
• after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
• after being in contact with someone who has a cold or flu
• before touching your eyes, nose, or mouth and
• before preparing food and eating.

3. Don’t share personal items
The flu virus can spread when someone touches an object with the virus on it and then touches their face.

If a member of your household has the flu:
• keep their personal items, such as towels, bedding and toothbrushes separate; and
• do not share eating and drinking utensils, food or drinks.

4. Clean surfaces
Flu viruses can live on surfaces for a number of hours. You should regularly clean surfaces such as tables, benches and fridge doors with soap and water or detergent.

5. Avoid close contact with others
Keeping your distance from others (at least 1 metre apart) when you are feeling unwell will help reduce the chances of spreading the flu virus to other people.

Avoid going out in public when you are sick. If you have the flu, you should remain at home while you are unwell and have a fever. You should not go to work or school or attend other public gatherings and avoid taking public transport.

Help stop the spread ...