

Cleaning Recommendations for Flu

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How Flu Virus Spreads

Influenza virus is present in respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes of infected persons. It can easily be transferred from person to person via hands touching a contaminated surface, then touching eyes, nose, or mouth. Influenza viruses typically can survive on surfaces for 2 to 8 hours. They can survive on both porous surfaces (such as towels) and nonporous surfaces (such as books and tables). The H1N1 virus is fairly easily inactivated using ordinary cleaning and disinfecting products.

Precautions and Planning

To lessen your potential exposure to influenza virus, take basic precautions such as washing your hands well and frequently; using disposable wipes to clean shared surfaces such as remote controls and computer kiosks; and cleaning hard surfaces in your own room (bedside table, etc.) more often than usual. In shared living situations, make disposable disinfectant wipes available to encourage users to wipe down shared “high-touch” objects such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, remote controls, keyboards, and telephones before each use. If you’re using gel hand sanitizer, it should be at least 60% alcohol (ethanol, ethyl alcohol, isopropanol, and other varieties are all acceptable). The gel should be rubbed into hands until they are dry.

In the event of an outbreak of H1N1 virus on campus or in your household, you will want to increase cleaning frequency and to both clean and disinfect surfaces.

Surface Cleaning Products

During an outbreak, you want not only to clean (remove surface dirt) but to disinfect (kill germs) as well. Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces at least once a day, especially those in living rooms or shared break rooms (e.g., kitchen counters, table tops, chair arms, desks, doorknobs, refrigerator door handles, microwave doors and buttons). Choose cleaning products that say they “disinfect.” (Disinfectant ingredients include chlorine, hypochlorite, hydrogen peroxide, iodine-based antiseptics, alcohols, peroxygen compounds, and detergents.) There is no need for products to be specially marked as “antiviral” or “antibacterial.” If disinfectants are not available, you can use a dilute chlorine bleach solution. Mix 1 bleach container capful of bleach with one gallon of water. Wearing gloves to protect your hands, use a cloth to apply this to surfaces and let stand for 3 to 5 minutes before rinsing with clean water. (Remember never to mix bleach with ammonia. If members of the household are sensitive to the smell of bleach, you may want to use a different disinfectant product.) Clean surfaces with paper towels or other disposable wipes rather than reusable sponges. Influenza virus is also destroyed by heat (167-212°F [75-100°C]). Eating utensils should be washed in a dishwasher or by hand with soap and water.

Cleaning Recommendations for Households and Individual Rooms

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Bathrooms

All bathroom fixtures must be cleaned and disinfected daily. Be sure to clean items that are especially likely to be touched, such as door handles, stall latches, shower heads and shower controls, shower curtains, soap dispensers, hand dryers, and towel dispensers.

Linens and Laundry Rooms

Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) belonging to people who get sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but it is important that these items not be shared without being thoroughly washed first. Linens should be washed by using household laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting. Individuals should avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating themselves. Individuals should wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after handling dirty laundry. It is not necessary to add bleach. Any surface in a shared laundry room that may come in contact with soiled clothing should be cleaned and disinfected daily. This would include the tops and fronts of machines, folding tables, chairs/benches, laundry baskets, and floors.

Bedrooms

If a resident becomes ill and relocates from a shared room, the person’s bedding should be laundered, and all hard surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected before others use the room. If a person self-isolates in a room for the duration of illness, upon recovery, that person should launder his/her own linens, securely bag and dispose of the trash, and clean and disinfect hard surfaces in the room.

Garbage

In residence halls, residents should be encouraged to bag their own trash before bringing it to the collection point. Housemates should bag and tie shut their own trash if they have discarded used tissues or potentially infectious items. If there is an outbreak in your house, bagged garbage should go straight to outdoor bins whenever possible, and shared indoor trash collection bins should be cleaned and disinfected each time trash is taken out.

Questions?

Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Flu.gov (as of August 27, 2009)
www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/qa.htm, www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/institutions/guidance/,
www.flu.gov/plan/individual/panfacts.html