

Staying well in winter

Winter is when many of us will be exposed to increased risks of illness. Here are some tips for staying healthy this winter and during the colder months.

With the shorter days and colder weather we often stay indoors where it is warm, becoming less active and eating unhealthy foods.

Tips to stay healthy

To stay healthy during the colder months:

- choose amounts of nutritious food and drinks that meet your energy needs
- enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five major food groups and aim to include two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetable in your diet each day
- limit intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol
- keep hydrated - drink plenty of water
- be active every day in as many ways you can
- reduce sitting time in front of the television or computer
- get an influenza vaccine each year
- quit smoking.

Quit smoking

Any time of year is the right time to quit smoking. Quitting smoking will significantly improve your health and reduce your risk of disease and premature death.

If you're thinking of quitting smoking call the Quitline on 13 7848 (13 QUIT) or access the Quitline via [QuitTasmania](#)

The Quitline is a confidential telephone information and advice service available throughout Australia.

For the cost of a local call (except mobiles), professional advisors provide encouragement and support to help smokers quit. They can help smokers at whatever stage they may be at in the quitting process.

Cover your cough

When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth with your elbow (rather than your hand) or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth. Make sure you dispose of the tissue afterwards in the nearest waste bin and wash your hands. This helps avoid the spread of germs that cause colds and flu.

Wash your hands

Hand washing helps to reduce the spread of germs that cause colds and flu. Wash your hands often to get rid of the germs on them. Use soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub.

Avoid spreading flu

The best way to prevent flu is by getting a yearly flu vaccine.

If you do get sick with a cold or influenza:

1. When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth with your elbow (rather than your hand).
2. Wash your hands often to get rid of germs on them. Use soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub.
3. Stay at home from work. If your child is unwell keep them at home from childcare or school.
4. Avoid visiting people likely to get really unwell from flu, including infants and young children, pregnant women, those with medical problems and the elderly.
5. Stay at least one metre away from other people especially when coughing.
6. If you do need to see a doctor, call ahead and let them know you have a cold or flu. This will allow the medical service to plan your visit to prevent your infection spreading to others.

Visit [fluTAS](#) for more information.

Flu vaccine

A flu vaccine is recommended every year for anyone aged six months and over who wishes to reduce the likelihood of severe complications from flu.

The best time to get your vaccine is from mid-April.

A free seasonal flu vaccine is available for the following people from their GP:

- [All adults aged 65 years and over](#)
- [Pregnant women](#) at any stage in their pregnancy
- [Adults and children aged from six months of with chronic medical conditions](#) such as heart, lung, liver or kidney diseases, asthma, diabetes, cancer, impaired immunity and neuromuscular conditions
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over six months old.
- [All children aged from six months to under five years](#)

Visit [fluTAS](#) for more information.

Read about [flu vaccine](#)

Read about [vaccine safety](#)

Flu verses common cold

[Flu and common colds](#) are respiratory illnesses but are caused by different viruses. Colds are the most common cause of illness in children and adults.

There are over 200 types of viruses that can cause colds, but there are usually just two or three types of flu viruses circulating each year.

In general, [flu](#) is worse than common colds, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are often more severe and start suddenly.

Colds are usually milder than influenza and symptoms generally develop over a longer period. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose, and a sore throat.

Influenza can sometimes lead to severe complications such as pneumonia and even death, especially in vulnerable people, which is why it is so important for these people to get vaccinated against the flu.

Colds generally do not result in serious health problem, and symptoms usually last from a few days to a week.

Because colds and flu can share many symptoms, it can be difficult (or even impossible) to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Special tests can be carried out, when needed, to tell if a person has the flu.

If flu is diagnosed by a doctor they may suggest specific medicines to treat influenza, particularly if the person is in a high risk group and the treatment can be started within the first few days of illness.

Cold and influenza symptoms can be relieved with warm drinks or lozenges, nasal sprays and paracetamol.

Antibiotics will **not** help a cold or flu.

Aspirin should not be given to children with viral infections such as colds or flu as it can cause a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

Emergency departments are for emergencies

Emergency Departments at hospitals can get extremely busy, especially in winter. It's a place where life and death situations are dealt with every day. For this reason, people are encouraged to remember that Emergency Departments are for emergencies only.

So if you've got a cough or a cold and are thinking of heading to Emergency, speak to your GP first. Alternatively, you can call **healthdirect** on **1800 022 222** to speak to a registered nurse about your symptoms. This service is free of charge and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If the situation is urgent or life threatening, you should call 000 immediately or go directly to an Emergency Department for help.

Save Triple-zero (000) for saving lives

It is important to recognise that ambulances are for getting people with urgent or life threatening conditions to hospital quickly and are not taxis. Calling an ambulance for a non-urgent condition might delay someone else with an urgent condition getting to hospital quickly.

Some people with a non-urgent condition might think they will be seen sooner if they are taken to an Emergency Department by ambulance. This is a **not** so.

All patients are treated according to their medical needs, whether they arrive by ambulance or not.

Air quality in winter

Air pollution makes many chronic conditions worse. These include heart failure, diabetes, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and asthma.

If you use a wood heater make sure you know how to burn wood efficiently so no smoke is visible from your chimney while the heater is burning – apart from for a few minutes during start up.

Every year wood heaters causes serious air pollution in many Tasmanian towns and cities leading to hospital admissions each winter that could otherwise have been avoided.

Check the [EPA website](#) for tips on how to burn wood well.

Preventing mould and condensation

With colder weather coming there are several ways to help prevent mould and condensation problems from happening in your home. Mould and condensation can occur on any surface, look unpleasant and can increase the risk of respiratory illness.

A dry, well-aired home is easier to heat and healthier for you and your family

- Open doors and windows as often as possible when you are at home.
- Use extractor fans when cooking, showering or using the clothes dryer.
- Hang washing outside to dry.
- Wipe condensation off walls and windows when it occurs.

Chronic conditions

Respiratory illnesses are more common in winter and can cause flare ups of chronic conditions such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), asthma, heart failure and diabetes.

Keep a healthy lifestyle over the colder months by continuing to be active and eat healthy food.

If you smoke, quit now. See your doctor for help.

Some respiratory illnesses can be prevented by a yearly flu vaccination and a pneumococcal vaccination for people who have chronic conditions. Check with your doctor that you are up to date with these vaccinations.

Follow your chronic condition management plan from your doctor, taking your medications as prescribed. If you notice any early worsening of your symptoms, see your doctor.

Find out more about [heart failure](#), [diabetes](#), [asthma](#), [COPD](#)