

What Should I Know if My Roommate is Sick with the Flu?

Influenza (flu) is a potentially serious contagious disease, and we will likely be encountering a lot of influenza and influenza-like illness in the USD community in the coming months. Influenza viruses are thought to spread easily from person to person, mainly through coughs and sneezes. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object, and then touches his own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing his hands. Influenza spreads readily in crowded environments such as dormitories. It is important for dormitory residents to take special care in preventing the spread of flu. Fortunately, there are effective steps that you can take to prevent catching the flu, even if your roommate or dorm-mate is sick.

If Your Roommate or Dorm-mate is Sick With the Flu:

- If you are in a group at [high risk for flu complications](#) and have been exposed to a flu-like illness, contact the Student Health Center (ext. 4595) for recommendations regarding medications to prevent influenza infection. Try to avoid any close contact (within 6 feet) with any person ill with the flu.
- Your roommate or dorm-mate may consider going home or a relative's home, to recover if possible.
- If recovery at home is not possible, try to help make your roommate as comfortable as possible. Make sure he has the supplies he needs while he remain in isolation until 24 hours after his fever breaks (no fever > 100 F without the use of fever reducing medicines). Offer to pick up tissues, clear fluids, over-the-counter medications, books or movies, etc.
- Try to limit close contact (within 6 feet) with the ill person, while providing as much support as possible.
- USD is not able to provide alternate living accommodations for ill students or their roommates. If you are able to find other living accommodations while your roommate is ill, that is an option you can explore.
- Take everyday preventive measures and encourage your roommate to do the same.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Encourage ill roommates or dorm-mates to wear a mask any time they are in close contact (within 6 feet) with others, or in common areas such as the bathroom. Masks are available from residential staff or from the Student Health Center.
- Remind the sick person to cover her cough, and to wash her hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleaners (especially after coughing or sneezing).
- Assist your roommate or dorm-mate in contacting Residential Life staff (your RA or CD) for meal delivery while he/she is ill.
- Check on your roommate often. If you have concerns about his/her condition, contact the residential life staff.
- Use paper towels for drying hands after hand washing or dedicate cloth towels to each person in the household. For example, have different colored towels for each person.
- If possible, try to maintain good ventilation in shared household areas (e.g., keeping windows open in restrooms, kitchen, bathroom, etc.).

Household Cleaning, Laundry, and Waste Disposal

- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in the trash. Wash your hands after touching used tissues and similar waste.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables and surfaces in the bathroom) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately but, more importantly, these items should not be shared without washing thoroughly first.
- Wash linens (such as bed sheets and towels) by using household laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting. Avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating yourself. Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers right after handling dirty laundry.
- Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap.

Am I at High Risk for Complications From the Flu?

When it comes to influenza (the flu), it is very important to know your risk status. Some people have health conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness if they get the flu.

Groups at high risk for complications from the flu:

The CDC identifies the high-risk groups for flu to be:

- Children less than 5 years old (especially under 2);
- Persons aged 65 years or older;
- Persons less than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy ;
- Pregnant women;
- Adults and children who have **chronic diseases** of
 - the lung (including asthma),
 - heart (except high blood pressure),
 - liver,
 - kidneys,
 - blood (including sickle-cell disease and chronic anemia),
 - nervous system;
 - neuromuscular disorders , or
 - metabolic disorders (including diabetes);
- Adults and children who have a suppressed immune system (including immune suppression caused by medications or by HIV);
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.

Persons who fall into these high-risk groups, or are caregivers or close contacts of high-risk persons, should consider getting immunized to prevent the flu. If they are exposed to, or develop, an influenza-like illness, they should contact their healthcare provider for advice on treatment.