

Q & A

We asked Susan to answer a few of the most common questions we're hearing from the Castlemaine community.



Q: Is the way you manage infection control in a hospital different to at home?

A: The basic principles of infection control are the same, but of course within the hospital system we have a 'magnified' situation.

We have more people and those people have contact with multiple patients and clients every day. Within the hospital system we need to be extremely vigilant because we have patients and clients who are elderly or very young, immunocompromised or at risk for a variety of reasons. So what we do is an accelerated version of basic infection control. Here at Castlemaine Health the staff do an exceptional job.

Q: Why is hand washing and wiping surfaces so important?

A: Washing hands is the core of infection control. If you don't have good hand hygiene the rest can be futile, whether you're in a hospital or at home.

Viruses like influenza and COVID-19 are all spread by contact and droplets.

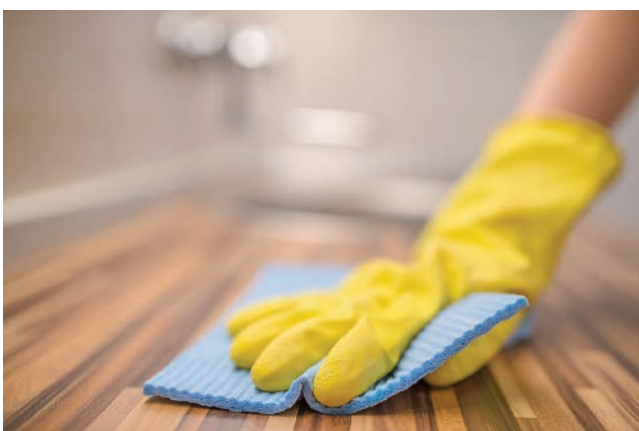
Essentially, you pick up one of these viruses by someone coughing or sneezing on you and the droplets come in direct contact with your mucous membranes (mouth/nose/eyes) or, by touching a surface where the virus has been transported by someone else and bringing your hands to your face where it enters through the mucous membranes.



Q: Do I need anti-bacterial surface spray?

A: No, not in a home situation. It's the mechanical process of cleaning that does the work. What you clean the surface with is less important.

When it comes to how often a surface needs to be cleaned that's down to what the surface is used for, what it's exposed to and how many people have touched it. How long a virus can live on a surface varies, so frequent cleaning of surfaces you use often is best.



Q: Does it matter what you wash your hands with?

A: No, it doesn't really matter what product you use, it's the mechanical action of washing that is most important. You do need to use soap of some sort to create the sudsing that assists with removal of the micro-organisms.

Washing should be vigorous and take about 20 seconds (one idea circulating at the moment is that this is about the length of time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice).

The water doesn't need to be hot, it's the soap and the action that's most important.

If you don't have access to a handbasin you can use alcoholic hand sanitiser, making sure that the amount of alcohol in the product is over 60 per cent and preferably over 70 per cent.

If your hands are soiled you'll need to wash them. Alcohol-based hand sanitiser won't kill the micro-organisms if they can't get to your skin.



Q: Health workers wear masks so why shouldn't everyone?

A: In a hospital we might wear a mask when we're dealing with someone who has an infection but that's because we're in very close proximity.

Masks are useful in this current situation for someone who has tested positive to reduce the spread of droplets, but wearing a mask when out in the open, or in normal public situations is not thought to be beneficial in prevention of contracting a virus.

For a mask to be effective at preventing you from catching a virus it would need to be:

- Worn appropriately (not taken on and off to talk, eat, etc)
- Worn for a period of time and then discarded. Having a cloth mask that you wear day after day and handle in between is not a good idea
- Seal the entire nose and mouth. The square surgical masks you see people wearing do not do this
- Be effective at filtering out tiny virus particles
- Be changed every few hours. The humidity of your breath makes a mask of limited use after a few hours.

Q: What else can I do?

A: Stick to the basics of infection control. In the current situation it is very important that you do as requested. If you've travelled or have been in contact with a case of COVID-19 and need to self-isolate. If you are feeling unwell, also stay home.

Look after yourself, your health, your immune system and manage your stress levels.

Try to live as normal a life as possible and care for your fellow human beings. Reach out and say hello. Make use of technology like FaceTime or Skype to contact an elderly relative or text a neighbour to see if they have everything they need.

Be informed but choose reputable sources of information and think twice before you share unsubstantiated or sensational messages. You don't know the impact it may have on someone who is already in a fragile state.



The Department of Health and Human Services has lots of resources and information is updated daily www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus.

Castlemaine Health is publishing information about the changes to its services as a result of COVID-19 at www.castlemainehealth.org.au/coronavirus.