



Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases

This was the catchy slogan authorities in 1950s Britain coined to remind the population to be more hygienic. Influenza A virus cause influenza pandemics. The virus is transmitted from one person to another in droplets that are breathed out or that are more forcefully expelled when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes. One good sneeze can send tens of thousands of virus particles across a room. Another person can become infected if he or she breathes in these droplets. But this is not the most common path of infection. Instead, most droplets fall out of the air onto another person's skin, onto a soft or porous surface, or onto a hard surface like a desk. And the virus can survive for up to 48 hours on a hard surface! It is not only persons who are obviously ill who may pose a threat!

Influenza can be transmitted to others before the person with the disease feels ill, typically during the 24 hours before the onset of symptoms. With the onset of symptoms, adults remain spreaders of the virus for up to five days and young children for as long as seven days. As well, between 30 and 50 percent of people who harbor the virus, but never fall ill with it, pass it on to other people.

Social distancing measures are designed to limit the frequency of close contact and interaction between people and to encourage people to keep at least 3 feet or an arms-length away from each other. In the event of pandemic flu it is wise to also limit unnecessary travel and recommend the need for face-to-face meetings to be reviewed wherever possible.

Hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette are vital elements of an infection prevention and control framework. The most common way of becoming infected is through picking up viral particles on the hands and transferring them to the mouth or especially, the eyes. The best way to limit this contact spreading of the virus is the frequent washing of hands with soap and warm water or use of an alcohol (61%) degermer.