

Social Distancing in an Influenza Pandemic

Social distancing is the public health practice of encouraging people to keep their physical distance from each other during disease outbreaks in order to slow the spread of infection. The purpose of social distancing is to reduce the spread of influenza and to lessen the impact on society and especially on the medical care system. In addition, it may enable some to avoid infection until a vaccine is available. **If you are sick with the influenza pandemic, the best way to keep it from spreading is stay home!**

How do I practice social distancing?

Here are some useful tips on properly socially distancing yourself

- *Avoid handshakes, hugs, and kisses*
Handshaking as a customary greeting enables virus transmission through skin-to-skin contact. Substitute something else — smile, wave or bump elbows.
- *Avoid the lunchroom rush*
Whether you eat lunch in the employee dining room, cafeteria, or a restaurant, avoid the rush. Eat earlier or later, eat at home or eat with just a few people in a quiet area, inside or out.
- *Avoid using public pens*
Public pens are found at the retail counter, at the building or hotel guest registration, at the bank, in the benefits office, and many other places. Use your own pen. In conference rooms, don't use the public whiteboard markers. Carry your own.
- *Avoid the commuter rush periods*
If you commute via public transportation, take advantage of your employer's flex time policy to shift your working hours. Avoid times when you'll be exposed to crowds.
- *Find a quiet place*
If you're at a bar, concert, or other social venue, find a place that is not as crowded and sit there. You'll still have fun, but you'll reduce the risk of becoming infected if someone is sick.
- *Substitute tele-meetings for face-to-face meetings*
Reducing the number or duration of face-to-face meetings reduces the opportunity for virus transmission. Shift as much of the agenda as possible to email or teleconference.
- *Use larger conference rooms*
If you must meet face-to-face, use the largest available conference room. Larger rooms have better ventilation, and there's more room to spread out.

Why should I socially distance myself?

There are a number of reasons:

- During a pandemic everyone is susceptible to pandemic influenza and you could then transmit it to others more vulnerable than you

- Small groups are better than big groups because it reduces the risk of exposure
- People who are less than 3 feet away from an infected person have the greatest risk of infection
- Contaminated surfaces can transmit the influenza virus for 24 hours
- People may not show signs and could be contagious. You can be contagious 24-48 hours before illness onset
- People are most contagious when they are ill
- After the onset of illness, adults are contagious for 1 week, and children are contagious for 2 weeks

What are the advantages of social distancing?

It slows and decreases transmission of influenza which limits the effects on individuals plus schools, workplaces and the health care system.

What are the disadvantages of social distancing?

There are costs to this method. Not only the costs related to lost school days, missed work and all the rest of the obvious consequences. But the loss of social relationships which are key to a community's resilience and ability to get through an event which affects everyone at once. We can see this if we take the objective of social distancing to its logical conclusion: what if we all hid away, each from everyone else. When socially distancing, remember to not take it to the extreme and remove yourself from the world -- you still have to participate, but do it in a safe way until the pandemic clears.