

THE FIGHT AGAINST H1N1

As the government and healthcare institutions beef up their precautionary measures against a H1N1 outbreak here, you can do your part with these precautions.

1. Mask up

Do this especially if you're not feeling well and have to venture outdoors to see a doctor. "Instead of looking at those who put on masks with contempt, we should follow the Japanese and use a mask in public whenever we have a cold. I find that very considerate," said Dr Baskaran Surendran of Silver Cross Clinic (Marsiling).

Would any surgical mask do? "For some medical workers who are most exposed to the virus, a Ng5 mask is necessary. At my clinic I use a regular mask for now but may have to use the Ng5 if the situation gets worse," said Dr Surendran.



2. Wash and dry your hands

You can also pick the H1N1 virus up indirectly from an infected person by touching an object he recently touched, and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

"That's why every person should make hand washing a habit, even when he is not ill," advised Dr Rupert See of Raffles Medical.

"As long as you wash with soap and water, or clean

with an alcohol-based hand cleanser, for at least 15 to 20 seconds, it should be acceptable. You should also dry your hands thoroughly after washing as damp hands can pick up germs easily. When dry, your hands would stay clean and germ-free longer," he said.

3. Should I get a flu vaccination?

There is currently no vaccine for humans for the H1N1 flu. (There is, however, one for pigs.)

Doctors have said the current common flu vaccine is ineffective against H1N1 flu.

But some general practitioners TODAY spoke to still advised those at higher risk — including the elderly, young children, healthcare workers, those with chronic diseases and travellers — to get vaccinated against normal human influenza.

"Generally I promote vaccinations as an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure," said Dr Surendran.

Plus, added Dr Lily Aw, a general practitioner in private practice, such vaccinations could reduce the cases of flu, so that they would not be confused with H1N1 flu.

4. Caregivers, take note

Caregivers of those suffering from flu must be extra vigilant and adopt good personal hygiene such as frequent handwashing and wearing a mask, when handling patients, advised Dr Aw.

"You should have only one caregiver taking care of the patient. If possible, keep the patient in a separate room from the other members of the family. Minimise physical contact with the patient and handle soiled laundry carefully," she said.