

For Immediate Release | December 20, 2018

## Help prevent the spread of illnesses this winter

Interior Health is asking the public visiting our health facilities to please do their part to keep loved ones safe from infectious illnesses this winter.

At this time of year, it is not unusual for health care facilities to experience outbreaks. Both gastrointestinal illness (GI) and respiratory infections (RI) are highly contagious and common in the community during the winter months.

GI and RI are generally caused by viruses. These viruses can easily spread person to person through contaminated hands and in droplets containing germs when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Children and individuals over 65 years of age are particularly vulnerable.

While there is no single way to protect against GI and RI, a combination of practices will provide the best protection possible.

### 5 ways you can help to protect vulnerable patients and prevent the spread of illness.

- **Don't visit if you are feeling unwell.**
  - As hard as this is, it's important to stay home if you are sick to prevent the spread of illness. Instead, chat via the telephone or online video if available, and arrange to spend time together once you are symptom-free. People can remain infectious for up to five days after symptoms appear.
- **Get the influenza (flu) shot.**
  - Flu season is Dec. 3 – March 31, so there is plenty of time to benefit from immunization. See your community pharmacist, physician, public health unit, or [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca) for more information about receiving a flu shot.
- **Wear a mask.**
  - Remember, all visitors are expected to wear a surgical mask during flu season if they have not been immunized against influenza. You can spread influenza before you develop symptoms.
  - Masks are located at facility front entrances, reception desks, and at various other locations throughout Interior Health facilities.
- **Cover your cough.**
  - Use a tissue or your elbow to cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- **Wash your hands frequently.**
  - Use soap or hand sanitizer, located at front entrances and throughout Interior Health facilities.

Thank you for helping to protect yourself and those around you.

-30-