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## Protecting loved ones and staying healthy over the holidays

The festive season is a time of celebrating with loved ones. Unfortunately, holiday mingling brings together people AND germs.

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

Gastrointestinal illness is generally caused by viruses and bacteria, and occasionally from the toxins created by bacteria. The illness is spread from person to person through germs in the stool or vomit of infected people.

Respiratory infections are spread through droplets containing the virus or bacteria when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Respiratory infections can be caused by influenza (the flu).

While there is no single way to protect against every illness, a combination of practices will provide the best protection possible. Here's what you can do to protect your loved ones and others in hospital or residential care facilities:

- 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 disease. Instead, chat via the telephone or online video if available, and arrange to spend time together once you are symptom-free.
- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day, particularly after coughing and sneezing.
- Cough into your elbow or a tissue.
- Get a flu (influenza) shot. It's not too late to be immunized. December is considered the start of flu season, which lasts through until at least April, so there is plenty of time to benefit from immunization. See your community pharmacist, physician or public health unit to inquire about receiving a flu shot. For more information about the influenza vaccine visit [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca).
- Wear a mask. Remember, all visitors at Interior Health facilities are asked to wear a surgical mask during flu season if they have not been immunized against influenza. Masks are provided at entrances, reception desks, and at various other locations throughout Interior Health facilities.

For more information visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca).

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