

Advice on Household Disinfection at the Height of Influenza Season

Influenza is a highly infectious viral disease. In Hong Kong, the peak season is from January to March and from July to August. Influenza is transmitted from person to person by droplet or contact of respiratory secretion (direct or indirect). Since infective agents can survive in the environment for a period of time, it is essential to maintain good household environmental hygiene to minimize the transmission of influenza.

Everybody has a role to play in the control of influenza by practising good personal hygiene and effective infection control at the relevant settings. The following actions are advised for maintaining a clean and hygienic household environment for the prevention of influenza and containing its spread:

Maintain good ventilation

- Windows should be opened for better ventilation
- Switch on fans or exhaust fans to enhance air flow
- Keep air-conditioners well-maintained
- Clean and wash the dust-filters frequently

Maintain household environment clean and hygienic

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, furniture, toys, utensils, toilet, bath room and floor at least daily by using appropriate disinfectant (e.g. 1 part of 5.25% household bleach in 99 parts of water for non-metallic surface or 70% alcohol for metallic surface), wait until dry and then rinse with water. (*Please see Box 1 below for procedures of preparing/ using diluted bleach.*)
- If places/ utensils/ clothes are contaminated by respiratory secretions, vomitus or excreta, use disposable towels to wipe them away. Then disinfect the surface and the neighbouring area with appropriate disinfectant (e.g. 1 part of 5.25% household bleach in 49 parts of water for non-metallic surface or 70% alcohol for metallic surface), leave for 15-30 minutes, and then rinse with water. (*Please see Box 1 below for procedures of preparing/ using diluted bleach.*)
- Clean the floor regularly and increase the frequency as the circumstances required, and keep it dry.
- Carpets should be kept clean by daily vacuum cleaning and regular washing.
- Clean and change bed sheets, pillow cases, towels and clothes regularly.
- If pets (such as cats and dogs) are kept, increase the frequency of cleansing.
- Rubbish should be properly wrapped up and discarded into garbage bins with lids, and empty garbage bins at least once a day.

Maintain toilet and bathroom clean and hygienic

- Keep toilets and bathrooms clean and dry.
- Provide liquid soap and disposable paper towels for washing hands.
- Ensure the flushing system of the toilet is in proper function at all times. Flush after using toilet.
- Towels should never be shared. Personal towels to be reused must be stored properly and washed thoroughly at least once daily. It is even better to have more than one towel for frequent replacement.

Box 1

Procedures of Preparing / Using Diluted Bleach

- Keep windows open when diluting or using bleach to ensure good ventilation.
- Beware when diluting or using bleach as it irritates mucous membranes, the skin or the airway
- Cold water should be used for dilution as hot water decomposes the active ingredient of bleach and renders it ineffective.
- Use measuring jug to measure proper volume of bleach for dilution.

Precaution:

- Avoid using bleach on metals, wool, nylon, silk, dyed fabric and painted surfaces.
- Avoid touching the eyes. If bleach gets into the eyes, immediately rinse with water for at least 15 minutes and consult a doctor.
- Bleach should not be used together or mixed with other household detergents as this reduces its effectiveness in disinfection and causes chemical reaction.
- For effective disinfection, diluted bleach should be used within 24 hours after preparation as decomposition increase with time if left unused.