

What precautions should people take?

The Wuhan virus has reinforced the need to take precautions, even though it has not spread within the community here. Senior Health Correspondent **SALMA KHALIK** discusses the best ways to keep your hands clean and the most effective masks for sick people.

KEEPING HANDS CLEAN

Q Are hand sanitisers or wet wipes better?

Soap and water



- Your best bet is actually to wash your hands with soap and water, said Dr Kalisvar Marimuthu, senior infectious disease consultant at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID). Soap and water reduces the amount of all types of germs on your hands, so frequent hand washing should keep them clean.

Hand sanitisers



- But if you have no access to soap and water, then hand sanitisers with at least 60 per cent alcohol content are a good alternative.
- To be effective, you must use enough to cover your hands; rub the sanitiser over your hands for about 20 seconds, and leave it to dry naturally instead of wiping dry.
- Sanitisers with 60 to 95 per cent alcohol clean much better than those with lower alcohol or no alcohol in them, according to the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. It, too, says soap and water is better, as sanitisers do not eliminate all types of germs.

Antiseptic wet wipes

- As for the usefulness of antiseptic wet wipes, Dr Marimuthu said they should be used for cleaning environmental surfaces and are not for hands.
- A virologist from Queen Mary University of London did a study on wet wipes some years back and found that in some cases, using wet wipes actually spreads germs rather than removing them. To be at all effective, the wipes need at least 40 per cent alcohol. Those that are drying out should be discarded.



ALL ABOUT MASKS

There is currently no community spread of the Wuhan virus, so there is no need for people who are feeling well to wear masks. However, people who are sick should wear surgical masks when mingling with others.

Q Why not N95 masks? Aren't they supposed to be better than surgical masks?

- Yes, the N95 mask gives the best protection, but is not practical for the general public since most people do not know how to wear it correctly, said Professor Leo Yee Sin, executive director of the NCID. She said: "If you find the N95 mask easy to breathe in and comfortable, you are wearing it wrong and it's no use. It's only when it is difficult to breathe in that you are wearing it correctly."

- Surgical masks are good enough when worn by people who are sick, as they help cut the spread of germs.



Q Do reusable cloth masks work as well as surgical masks? These are cheaper since they can be washed and worn again.

- Dr Marimuthu said there are different types of cloth masks. "A number are for environmental particles and they may not be good enough for respiratory viruses," he said, so surgical masks are better.
- He added that only people who are sick should wear disposable surgical masks.



Q Young children are especially vulnerable, but it is not easy to put a mask on them as they are fidgety and tend to play with the mask. What practical tips do paediatricians have?

- Dr Lee Bee Wah, a paediatrician in private practice, said there is no point giving masks to toddlers. Adult masks do not fit them and it is almost impossible to get them to keep a child's mask on properly.
- She said if the child is sick, it is best to keep the child at home and away from others.
- There is no need for children to wear a mask if they are well as there is no community spread of the Wuhan virus.



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR HOME MAY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO SOMEONE WITH THE WUHAN VIRUS

You will need these items:



Disposable gloves



Surgical mask



A change of clothes



Bleach or an appropriate disinfectant



Plastic/trash bags



Water



Disposable cloths



Pail



Mop

Things to note

- Even after the person suspected of having the virus has been isolated elsewhere, do not host visitors in the residence until the place is sanitised.

- Avoid sharing household items (e.g. dishes, eating utensils, bedding). After using the items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water.

15 steps to clean up

1 Put on a surgical mask and gloves. Don't touch your face further.

2 Prepare the bleach solution/disinfectant as set out by the manufacturer.

3 Open the windows for ventilation.

4 Mop the floor with the disinfectant from one end to the other.

5 Soak pieces of cloth with the disinfectant and use them to wipe frequently touched areas and toilet surfaces.

6 Wash all bed linen with detergent in a washing machine.

7 If someone is being tested for the virus, don't use the bedding he had used until he is found to be free of infection.

8 Mop the floor again.

9 Throw all cloth, rags and other waste into double-lined trash bags.

10 Remove the gloves and wash your hands with soap and water.

11 Remove the mask and wash your hands with soap and water.

12 Throw gloves and mask into double-lined trash bags.

13 Separate the trash bags from other household waste. Dispose as regular waste as soon as possible.

14 Shower and change your clothes immediately.

15 Air/ventilate your house.