



It's that time of year again, when flu, swine flu and other nasty lurgies crop up. Here are some top ways to beat them ...

COLD COMFORT

Your winter survival guide

Q How many Australians will contract swine flu in 2010?

A "We are predicting up to one in five Aussies will get swine flu," Professor Robert Booy from the Children's Hospital at Westmead in Sydney says. "Two-thirds will be mild – the rest will be managed by a GP and only about two per cent will require hospitalisation.

"The overall death rate is predicted at less than 0.1 per cent. It's possible, but unlikely, that this year's strain may be stronger than last year's because viruses mutate."

Q So, should we be alarmed about swine flu?

A Careful yes, alarmed no. Normal garden varieties of influenza kill about 2000 Aussies every year, almost all over 65. "Swine flu deaths will probably be far fewer than this, but last year many young people under 65 (about 200) were killed and this is much higher than normal," Professor Booy says. "The good news is we're not expecting anywhere near pandemic levels people were worried about."

Q When should I get my vaccination?

A Don't wait. All Australians (including children older than six months) are entitled to a free swine flu vaccination. "There have been no more serious adverse reactions reported than normal flu shots, and around three million people in Australia have been already vaccinated," Professor Booy says.

Another seasonal flu vaccine out this month protects against swine flu and two other strains of seasonal influenza, but it will only be free to high-risk groups (pregnant women, those with chronic illness) or people over 65. Ask your doctor which is best for you.

Q When should I worry about my children?

A Children have less developed immune systems. "Their flu symptoms will last longer and be more noticeable," Professor Booy says. "Apart from fever, they will have more of a runny nose and cough than adults. Other swine flu symptoms for all ages include sore throat, mild vomiting, diarrhoea, headache, confusion, drowsiness, fever and sore muscles – for kids this may translate to reluctance to walk or less-than-usual liveliness!"

Know the signs

Rapid breathing is the serious, get-to-hospital sign of swine flu. That's more than 40 breaths per minute for kids over the age of one, and more than 25 breaths per minute for adults.

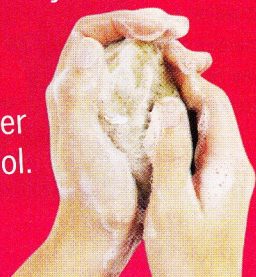
How can we protect ourselves against winter bugs?

✓ **WASH HANDS** in soapy water (hot or cold) for 15 seconds. Dry thoroughly.

✓ **KEEP COMPUTERS** and phones wiped down with antibacterial agents.

✓ **KEEP A PERSONAL SPACE** of 1m, and shake hands instead of kissing – especially sniffly folks.

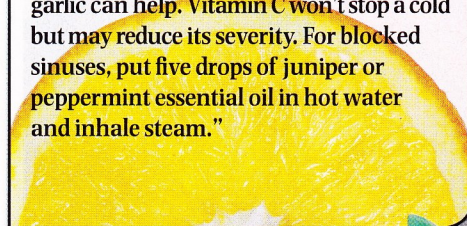
✓ **KEEP SNIFFLY** children with fever home from school.



HERBAL HELPER

Q I get sore throats and lose my voice every year during flu season. What can I do?

A "Many studies show astragalus can boost immunity," says Narelle Stegehuis, naturopath from www.massattack.com.au "Take it daily from March to June in tea or pill form. Always tell your doctor if you take other medicines though. Zinc lozenges and garlic can help. Vitamin C won't stop a cold but may reduce its severity. For blocked sinuses, put five drops of juniper or peppermint essential oil in hot water and inhale steam."



Breathe easy

Sniffly? Stuffed up airways? The portable EucoSteam Inhaler (rrp \$17.95 from pharmacies) with a few drops of eucalyptus added, is great for clearing blocked schnozzes or easing scratchy throats.

