



# Influenza Specialist Group Summary of 2012 Survey Results

[www.FluSmart.org.au](http://www.FluSmart.org.au)

# INTRODUCTION

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To coincide with the official launch of the 2012 flu season, where the flu vaccine will be available in doctors' surgeries across the country, the Influenza Specialist Group (ISG) conducted a national survey of 1068 respondents to explore how rife presenteeism (the phenomenon where employees turn up to work sick) is in Australia and examine attitudes about flu etiquette.

Research Now ran the online survey which asked:

- Have you ever gone to work with flu symptoms such as cough, cold, fever, muscle aches etc?
- If you have gone to work when sick, what was the main reason you went to work?
- In the past, have you participated in a social situation while feeling ill with flu symptoms?



# Introduction – continued

- Do you believe a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work while they are sick to prevent the virus from spreading?
- When people don't cover their mouths or noses when coughing or sneezing or continue to go about their day to day activities while sick, how does this make you feel?
- How would you react to someone clearly displaying flu symptoms in public and coughing/sneezing openly?
- When you are ill, how often do you wash or disinfect (e.g. with hand gel) your hands?
- Would you call or visit your doctor if you thought you had the flu?
- If you have suffered from flu symptoms in the past, what remedy/treatment have you tried?



# Key findings

- 90 per cent of Australians have gone to work with flu symptoms such as cold, cough, muscle aches and fever.
- The main reasons people go to work when sick are because they don't want to let their colleagues down (20%) and they worry about work building up or missing deadlines (19%).
- Australians are underestimating just how dangerous the flu can be with 18 per cent of those Australians going to work sick doing so because they don't think flu symptoms are a serious enough reason to stay at home.
- Almost 70 per cent of Australians have participated in a social situation while feeling ill with flu symptoms.
- The majority of Australians (61%) believe a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work to prevent the virus from spreading.



## Key findings – continued

- More than 80 per cent of Australians would move away from a person displaying flu symptoms and 36 per cent feel concerned about their health when sick people go about their day to day activities. However, only ten percent of Australians would tell a person who has the flu they should minimise contact with others. People aged 65 + are most likely to do this.
- More than half (56%) of Australians feel annoyed or frustrated when people continue to go about their day to day activities while sick.



- 84 per cent of Australians have never used anti-viral medications from the doctor.
- Only 40 per cent of Australians would call their doctor if they thought they had the flu.
- The most popular flu remedy/treatment is over the counter medications from the chemist (47%) and traditional remedies such as hot lemon drinks and chicken soup (18%).



## Key state findings – Victoria

- Almost 90 per cent of Victorians have gone to work sick with the flu because they don't want to let their colleagues down.
- The other main reasons Victorians go to work sick are they are worried about work building up or missing deadlines (18%).
- Victorians are underestimating just how dangerous the flu can be with 18 per cent of those Victorians going to work sick doing so because they don't think the flu is a serious enough reason to stay at home – a mindset that is potentially risking lives.
- Victorians are more likely than any other group to seek medical help if they thought they had the flu, with almost half (46%) saying they would call or visit their doctor if they had flu symptoms.
- Almost 70 per cent (67%) of Victorians have participated in a social situation while feeling ill with flu symptoms. This is despite the majority (61%) believing a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work to prevent the virus from spreading.
- Victorians are the most likely to use traditional remedies such as hot lemon drinks and chicken soup to fight the flu.

## Key state findings – Tasmania

- Tasmanians are the worst for going to work sick with 95% of them attending work with flu symptoms.
- The main reasons Tasmanians go to work sick is because they don't want to let their colleagues down (30%) and they don't believe flu symptoms are a serious enough reason to stay at home (25%).
- Almost 60% of Tasmanians have participated in a social situation while feeling unwell with flu symptoms.
- Almost half of Tasmanians don't bother to wash their hands more than usual when they are sick.





# Key state findings – South Australia

- 83 per cent of South Australians have gone to work sick with the flu because they don't want to let their colleagues down.
- The other main reasons South Australians go to work sick are they are worried about work building up or missing deadlines (20%).
- South Australians are underestimating just how dangerous the flu can be with 16 per cent of those South Australians going to work sick doing so because they don't think the flu is a serious enough reason to stay at home – a mindset that is potentially risking lives.
- Almost 70 per cent (67%) of South Australians have participated in a social situation while feeling ill with flu symptoms. This is despite the majority (60%) believing a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work to prevent the virus from spreading.
- South Australians are the most likely to use traditional remedies such as hot lemon drinks and chicken soup to fight the flu.

## Key state findings – Western Australia

- 90 per cent of West Australians have gone to work with flu symptoms.
- The main reason West Australians go to work when sick is because they are worried about loss of income (20 per cent)



- While almost 70 per cent of West Australians believe a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work to prevent the virus from spreading, they are reluctant to practice flu etiquette themselves with 66 per cent participating in a social situation while feeling ill with flu symptoms.
- West Australians are the least likely to call a doctor if they thought they had flu symptoms.

## Key state findings – Northern Territory

- People in the Northern Territory have the highest rate in Australia for participating in social situations while sick (71%)
- 86% of Northern Territorians have gone to work sick with the flu.
- People in the NT are underestimating just how dangerous the flu can be with a third of those Northern Territorians going to work sick doing so because they don't think flu symptoms are a serious enough reason to stay at home.
- 70 per cent of people in the NT believe a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work while they are sick to prevent the flu spreading. This is despite more than 70 per cent of them participating in a social situation while feeling unwell with flu symptoms.
- People in the NT are the least likely out of any state in Australia to call or visit a doctor if they thought they had the flu.

## Key state findings – Queensland

- 90 per cent of Queenslanders have gone to work with flu symptoms.
- The main reason Queenslanders go to work when sick is because they fear losing their income (20%).
- Almost 70 per cent of Queenslanders have participated in a social situation while feeling ill with flu symptoms. This is despite 60 per cent of them believing a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work to prevent the virus from spreading.
- Only 39% of Queenslanders would call the doctor if they thought they had the flu.
- Queenslanders are the most vigilant when it comes to preventing the flu from spreading with 70 per cent saying they wash or disinfect their hands more than usual when they are ill.

## Key state findings – New South Wales

- 92 per cent of people in NSW have gone to work with flu symptoms.
- The main reasons people in NSW go to work when sick are they don't want to let their colleagues down (21%) and they are worried about work building up or missing deadlines (20%).
- Almost 70% of people in NSW have participated in a social situation while feeling unwell with the flu.
- People in NSW are among the most hygienic in Australia with almost 70% of them washing or disinfecting their hands more than usual when they are ill.
- Over the counter flu medications from the chemist (46%) and traditional remedies such as hot lemon drinks, chicken soup etc (18%) are the two most popular remedies people in NSW try when suffering from the flu.



# Key state findings – Australian Capital Territory

- More than 92 per cent of those in the ACT believe a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work while they are sick to prevent the flu spreading. This is despite three quarters of them admitting to going to work with flu symptoms.
- 75 per cent of people in the ACT have gone to work with flu symptoms.
- The main reason people in the ACT go to work when sick is they are worried about work building up or missing deadlines. (44%).



## TABLE OF RESULTS

*Have you ever gone to work with flu symptoms such as cough, cold, fever, muscle aches etc?*

		Gender		Age					
Total		Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Total	1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
Yes	960	383	577	176	179	165	171	168	101
	90%	90%	90%	92%	94%	91%	91%	88%	80%
No	108	44	64	15	12	16	17	22	26
	10%	10%	10%	8%	6%	9%	9%	12%	20%

## *If you have gone to work when sick, what was the main reason you went to work ?*

		Gender		Age					
	Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Total	960	383	577	176	179	165	171	168	101
Loss of income	153	57	96	38	27	23	27	19	19
	16%	15%	17%	22%	15%	14%	16%	11%	19%
Fear of losing my job	51	25	26	16	11	1	11	10	2
	5%	7%	5%	9%	6%	1%	6%	6%	2%
Don't want to let my colleagues down	192	71	121	25	31	26	47	39	24
	20%	19%	21%	14%	17%	16%	27%	23%	24%
Worried about work building up or missing deadlines	181	80	101	17	43	39	32	33	17
	19%	21%	18%	10%	24%	24%	19%	20%	17%
Flu symptoms aren't a serious enough reason to stay at home	171	77	94	32	33	35	17	31	23
	18%	20%	16%	18%	18%	21%	10%	18%	23%
My boss expecting me to come	104	28	76	34	22	14	18	13	3
	11%	7%	13%	19%	12%	8%	11%	8%	3%
I don't really think about it	63	32	31	8	6	15	11	14	9
	7%	8%	5%	5%	3%	9%	6%	8%	9%
Other	45	13	32	6	6	12	8	9	4
	5%	3%	6%	3%	3%	7%	5%	5%	4%

*In the past, have you participated in a social situation while feeling ill with flu symptoms?*

		Gender		Age					
	Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Total	1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
Yes	713	268	445	162	142	119	118	111	61
	67%	63%	69%	85%	74%	66%	63%	58%	48%
No	262	120	142	21	34	44	48	65	50
	25%	28%	22%	11%	18%	24%	26%	34%	39%
Unsure	93	39	54	8	15	18	22	14	16
	9%	9%	8%	4%	8%	10%	12%	7%	13%

*Do you believe a person with flu symptoms should cancel social obligations and stay at home from work while they are sick to prevent the virus from spreading?*

		Gender		Age					
	Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Total	1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
Yes	651	256	395	88	115	109	131	124	84
	61%	60%	62%	46%	60%	60%	70%	65%	66%
No	175	84	91	52	32	29	14	32	16
	16%	20%	14%	27%	17%	16%	7%	17%	13%
Undecided	242	87	155	51	44	43	43	34	27
	23%	20%	24%	27%	23%	24%	23%	18%	21%

*When people don't cover their mouths or noses when coughing or sneezing or continue to go about their day to day activities while sick, how does this make you feel?*

		Gender		Age						
		Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Total		1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
Annoyed		476	202	274	64	83	89	83	87	70
		45%	47%	43%	34%	43%	49%	44%	46%	55%
Frustrated		115	46	69	32	29	15	17	14	8
		11%	11%	11%	17%	15%	8%	9%	7%	6%
Concerned about my health		389	133	256	72	65	61	81	71	39
		36%	31%	40%	38%	34%	34%	43%	37%	31%
Indifferent		88	46	42	23	14	16	7	18	10
		8%	11%	7%	12%	7%	9%	4%	9%	8%



*When you are ill, how often do you wash or disinfect (e.g. with hand gel) your hands?*

		Gender		Age						
		Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
More often than usual	Total	1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
		718	263	455	123	130	117	131	134	83
		67%	62%	71%	64%	68%	65%	70%	71%	65%
The same as usual		350	164	186	68	61	64	57	56	44
		33%	38%	29%	36%	32%	35%	30%	29%	35%

## *How would you react to someone clearly displaying flu symptoms in public and coughing/sneezing openly?*

		Gender		Age						
		Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Tell the person they are sick and therefore should minimise contact with others	Total	1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
		112	57	55	12	19	22	17	21	21
		10%	13%	9%	6%	10%	12%	9%	11%	17%
Do nothing		66	26	40	18	14	13	5	10	6
		6%	6%	6%	9%	7%	7%	3%	5%	5%
	Move away from the person if possible	890	344	546	161	158	146	166	159	100
	83%	81%	85%	84%	83%	81%	88%	84%	79%	

# *Would you call or visit your doctor if you thought you had the flu?*

		Gender		Age						
		Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Total		1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
	Yes	427	159	268	60	82	70	83	82	50
		40%	37%	42%	31%	43%	39%	44%	43%	39%
No		478	195	283	108	83	75	77	81	54
		45%	46%	44%	57%	43%	41%	41%	43%	43%
	Undecided	163	73	90	23	26	36	28	27	23
		15%	17%	14%	12%	14%	20%	15%	14%	18%

## *If you have suffered from flu symptoms in the past, what remedy/treatment have you tried?*

		Gender		Age						
		Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Total		1068	427	641	191	191	181	188	190	127
Nothing - grin and bear it		102	56	46	18	22	19	17	11	15
		10%	13%	7%	9%	12%	10%	9%	6%	12%
Over the counter flu medications from the chemist		503	191	312	100	92	88	94	83	46
		47%	45%	49%	52%	48%	49%	50%	44%	36%
Traditional remedies such as hot lemon drinks, chicken soup etc		192	72	120	40	32	32	26	33	29
		18%	17%	19%	21%	17%	18%	14%	17%	23%
Herbal remedies such as garlic, horseradish, Echinacea or similar		96	38	58	18	15	20	12	23	8
		9%	9%	9%	9%	8%	11%	6%	12%	6%
Anti-viral medications prescribed by a doctor		175	70	105	15	30	22	39	40	29
		16%	16%	16%	8%	16%	12%	21%	21%	23%