

The silver lining of COVID-19 - fewer colds and flus



Australians are projected to experience an average of 2.5 fewer colds and flus as a result of social distancing and hygiene practices

According to our latest research of 1,002 Australians, more than two in five Australians (41%) say they have experienced fewer colds and flus since social distancing and hygiene practices were introduced, compared to the same time last year. For every Australian who has had more sickness in this COVID year, 10 have been healthier.

The worries of coronavirus exacerbating the impacts of regular colds and flu has not been realised with just 4% of Australians saying they have had more colds and flus this year compared to last year, and most (55%) say they have had no change in the number of colds

and flus this year.

Almost one in six (15%) have experienced at least three fewer colds and flus over the three months period since the introduction of social distancing practices (23rd March), while more than one in four (27%) have had one to two fewer colds and flus. When these reductions are factored into the small proportion who have had more respiratory illness this year, Australians have experienced 21.3 million fewer colds and flus over the three months period since the introduction of social distancing practices.

21.3
million ↓

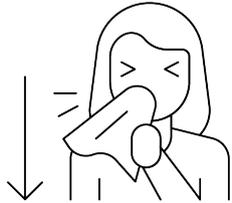
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A 99% reduction in lab-confirmed influenza cases

Another indicator of this population-level effect is in the number of lab-confirmed influenza recorded by the Department of Health. According to the [National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System](#), the number of lab-confirmed cases of influenza since the introduction of social distancing practices is 695, a 99.4% reduction from 107,196 over the same time last year (beginning of April to end of June).

If this reduction in influenza cases is replicated across influenza-related deaths for the entire year, then there will be around 3,000 fewer influenza deaths in 2020. This means that in Australia, the lives saved from influenza will be around thirty times the number of COVID-19 deaths (based on the 3,102 influenza deaths, ABS Causes of Death 2018).

If social distancing and hygiene practices continue to the end of the year, this will bring the reduction of colds and flus to a total of 63.8 million (March to December). In per capita term, Australians are experiencing on average 2.5 fewer colds and flus as a result of social distancing and hygiene practices this year.



More than two in five Australians (41%) say they have experienced fewer colds and flus since social distancing and hygiene practices were introduced, compared to the same time last year.

A reduction of 43.4 million sick days to a saving of \$14.4 billion

With the symptoms of the common cold lasting [two to three days](#) and flu possibly lasting for [more than a week](#), the reduction in incidences of colds and flus can have large economic benefits.

Assuming two days of sick leave per incidence of cold and flu for the 12.2 million Australians who are entitled to sick leave (full time or part time worker), and equal likelihood of catching a cold throughout a regular week, the total number of sick days that social distancing practices could save us almost 43.4 million.

Based on average Australian earnings, this reduction in sick leave saves the Australian economy almost \$14.4 billion. This modelling only factors in the wages savings from reduced sick leave, not the additional economic benefits from productivity or reduced expenses, and it does not account for carers leave to look after children with cold or flu, who generally have [twice as many colds per year](#) as adults.

While this doesn't offset the \$100.4 billion hit ([-5% in GDP](#)) that is projected by the Reserve Bank of Australia based on a gradual recovery model for the 2020 calendar year, it is a direct economic benefit of the COVID-19 health practices.

Recovering from COVID-19
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