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## The risks you face

### Chikungunya and dengue fever

**Spread by:** Chikungunya fever is transmitted through the bite of infected *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes while dengue fever is caused by the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitoes. The mosquitoes become infected when they feed on the blood of patients already suffering from the disease.

**Peak season:** Cases increase in the warmer months when mosquitoes breed more prolifically.

**Symptoms:** Sudden onset of fever, severe headaches, chills, nausea and joint pain although prolonged joint pain and fatigue are more commonly found in chikungunya fever.

**Treatment:** There is no specific drug treatment against chikungunya and dengue fever. Aspirin should, however, be avoided in cases of chikungunya fever as this may increase the risk of bleeding.

### Influenza

**Spread by:** The three main types of this viral infection are spread through direct contact with droplets of saliva or nasal secretions or by touching contaminated objects.

**Peak season:** Although the disease occurs year-round here, there are two seasonal peaks, namely one from May to July and the other from November to January.

**Symptoms:** Headaches, chills and a cough followed rapidly by a fever, appetite loss, muscle ache and tiredness.

**Treatment:** Antiviral medication and influenza vaccines.

### Sars (severe acute respiratory syndrome)

**Spread by:** The viral infection is spread by close contact with infected people and the droplets which they exhale.

**Peak season:** Dr Leong Hoe Nam, Singapore General Hospital's consultant infectious diseases physician, said: "As it's a respiratory tract infection, it follows cold weather."

**Symptoms:** Fever and cough but not all patients will have a runny nose and sore throat.

**Treatment:** Anti-bacterial and anti-viral drugs are available and vaccines are currently being developed.

### Avian influenza or bird flu

**Spread by:** This flu viral disease is spread by contact with infected birds, which shed the H5N1 virus in their saliva, nasal secretions and faeces. Person to person transmission may occur but rarely.

**Peak season:** No known peak season. Dr Chong Chia Yin, head and senior consultant in KK

Women's and Children's Hospital's department of paediatric medicine, said: "Despite the destruction of an estimated 150 million birds, the H5N1 virus is considered endemic in many parts of Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, China and possibly Laos."

**Symptoms:** Humans with bird flu typically report flu-like symptoms like fever, cough, sore throat, headaches and muscle aches. Symptoms can also include eye infections, pneumonia and other complications.

**Treatment:** Anti-viral flu medicines like Tamiflu

appear to be effective in treating bird flu although Dr Chong added that some resistance is developing.

Last month, drug company GlaxoSmithKline gained approval to sell a pre-pandemic bird flu vaccine in the European Union.

### HFMD (hand, foot and mouth disease)

**Spread by:** This childhood ailment is spread by direct contact with saliva, nasal and throat secretions, blister fluid and faeces of an infected person as well as by sharing of toothbrushes, eating utensils, food and toys.

**Peak season:** Dr Anita Menon from KK Women's and Children's Hospital's department of paediatric medicine, said: "HFMD is more common in tropical climates. In temperate countries, it tends to have a seasonal variation with cases mainly occurring in summer or autumn."

**Symptoms:** It usually starts with a mild fever, poor appetite, lethargy and sometimes a sore throat. One or two days after the fever starts, sores develop in the mouth and rashes, red spots or blisters may occur on palms and soles.

**Treatment:** Patients can only be treated for symptoms and should take adequate amounts of fluids and water.

Dr Chan Poh Chong, consultant paediatrician and head of ambulatory and adolescent paediatrics at National University Hospital's University Children's Medical Institute, said: "Even after recovering from a strain of HFMD, a child can succumb to another episode caused by a different strain. There is no known vaccine available."