

Stopping the Spread of Germs at Work

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How Germs Spread

Illnesses like the flu (influenza) and colds are caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. The flu and colds usually spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

How to Help Stop the Spread of Germs

Take care to:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough
- Clean your hands often
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Stay home when you are sick and check with a health care provider when needed
- Practice other good health habits.

Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough

Cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

Clean your hands often

When available, wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- then rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces. Wash for 15 to 20 seconds. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.

When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in the gel kills germs that cause colds and the flu.*

*Source: FDA/CFSAN Food Safety A to Z Reference Guide, September 2001: Handwashing.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs can live for a long time (some can live for 2 hours or more) on surfaces like doorknobs, desks, and tables.

Stay home when you are sick and check with a health care provider when needed

When you are sick or have flu symptoms, stay home, get plenty of rest, and check with a health care provider as needed. Your employer may need a doctor's note for an excused absence. Remember: Keeping your distance from others may protect them from getting sick. Common symptoms of the flu include:

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches, and
- nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, (much more common among children than adults).