



How to Stay Healthy and Prevent the Spread of Illness

How Illness Spreads

We all have germs. Some germs are good and some germs are bad. People, animals and the environment always carry bacteria, although most bacteria doesn't cause illness and may even help us. But some viruses cause infections that make you and others sick. These germs are called pathogens. Preventing illness means stopping the spread of the germs that can cause illness.

How to Stop Illness from Spreading

Wash your hands

Germs can't fly and they don't have legs, so they rely on other ways to get around. People spread germs by coughing and sneezing or by not washing their hands often enough. Someone else can pick up these germs on their hands. But they won't get sick unless the germs get into their body. This happens when soiled hands touch the mouth, nose or eyes. Washing your hands often will help keep you and those around you healthier.

Always wash your hands:

- After you use the washroom
- Before, during and after you prepare food
- Before you eat
- After touching animals or animal waste
- More often if someone in your home is ill
- Whenever your hands are soiled.

Wet your hands first with warm water and add soap. Rub your hands for 15 to 20 seconds, being careful to wash between the fingers and around the thumbs. Rinse and dry well.

Hand sanitizer or hand gels can be used when there is no water. Follow the directions on the label as to the amount to use. Be sure to rub your hands until they are dry before doing other things. Sanitizer *should not* be used after using the washroom or when preparing food or when your hands are visibly soiled. Hand gels will only work if there is no dirt or other material on your hands.

Cover your cough or sneeze

Germs travel a good distance in a cough or sneeze. Make sure germs never reach their destination by using a tissue to cover your mouth and nose. If one isn't handy, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands. If you sneeze or cough into your hands, the germs can hitchhike to the next surface you touch. If it's a surface that a lot of other people touch, like a doorknob, the germs can spread to a lot more people.

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Clean and Disinfect Surfaces

Be careful how you handle items and surfaces that have been soiled by someone who is coughing or sneezing, or who has vomiting or diarrhea. Germs on these surfaces will not cause illness, unless they are picked up on hands and are then moved to a person's nose, mouth or eyes. Soiled items and surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and then disinfected. It's best to use disposable cleaning cloths that can be discarded in a moisture proof bag.

Cleaning is not the same thing as disinfecting. Any soiled surface must be cleaned first to remove dirt and soil by scrubbing with soap and water. If the soil isn't removed first, the germs have a great place to hide from the disinfectant. After the surface is cleaned, disinfecting will kill many of the germs left behind.

You can use a commercial sanitizer or disinfectant or make your own. If you are using a commercial product, look for a label that says it is a disinfectant or sanitizer. Follow the instructions carefully on how long the product needs to stay on the surface to work. Make your own for surfaces that can be bleached by mixing a mild solution of bleach and water: ½ tsp (3 ml) bleach in one cup (250 ml) of water. If you are cleaning and sanitizing after a surface is soiled with body fluids (vomit or diarrhea), use a stronger solution: 1 tsp (6 ml) bleach in one cup (250ml) of water. The bleach solution should stay on the surface for a few minutes.

Stay home if you're ill

It is important to stay at home, and not to go to work or social events when you are sick. By doing so, you may avoid spreading germs to coworkers and friends. Here are a few tips for special situations:

- children should stay home from school and daycare when sick
- foodhandlers with diarrhea must not work with food until they are symptom-free for 24 hours
- if you work in an institution, you may be asked to stay off work for longer periods during outbreak situations.

Get Immunized

Make sure you and your children get the vaccines recommended by your health care provider at the proper times. Be aware of the routine immunization schedule in order to stay up-to-date with your shots. It is also important to keep records of all needles for the whole family.

Ask your health care provider or public health unit about newly funded vaccines. Adults need tetanus and diphtheria boosters repeated every 10 years. Additional needles may be needed for protection from illnesses when traveling to other countries.

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