



## Stop Spreading the Germs

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water.

Feces (poop) from people or animals is a main source of the kinds of germs that can get onto hands after people use the toilet or change a diaper, but also in less obvious ways, like after handling

raw meats that have invisible amounts of animal poop on them. A single gram of human feces—which is about the weight of a paper clip—can contain one trillion germs\*. Germs can also get onto hands if people touch any object that has germs on it because someone coughed or sneezed on it, or was touched by some other contaminated object. When these germs get onto hands and are not washed off, they can be passed from person to person and make people sick.

Source: cdc.gov

### Take Precautions

**Wash your hands.** It's the single best way to avoid a cold. Once germs are on your hands, it's easy for them to get into your body when you touch your eyes or mouth.

Do it thoroughly:

- Use soap and water.
- Scrub for at least 20 seconds.
- Wash before you eat or prepare food and after you use the bathroom or change a diaper.
- If you're taking care of someone who's sick, wash your hands before and after being with them.



**Use hand sanitizer.** It's the next best thing if you can't get to a sink. Keep a small bottle with you – at work, in your car, and in your purse. Buy one with at least 60% alcohol. Rub it all over your hands until they're dry.

**Cover your nose and mouth.** It's one of the best ways to keep a cold or flu away from your friends. Cough or sneeze into a tissue, then throw it out right away. If you don't have one with you, don't cough into your hand. You'll just smear germs on the next thing you touch. Instead, cough into the crook of your elbow.

**Disinfect your space.** You don't need to spend all day spraying disinfectant on every surface of your house. Still, if someone in your family is sick, use one to wipe down high-traffic spots: computers, phones, doorknobs, and TV remotes.

**Use disposables.** Cold and flu germs can cling to fabric. So when someone in your house is sick, replace cloth hand towels and dishrags with paper towels. Remove water glasses and add paper cups in the bathroom, too.

**Get a flu vaccine.** Anyone over 6 months old should get one. It's especially important if you're in a group that doctors say is at high risk for getting sick:

- Children
- Adults older than 50
- Women who will be pregnant during flu season
- Nursing home residents
- People with asthma or a long-term heart or lung condition
- People with diabetes or another condition that weakens the immune system -- the body's defense against germs
- Health care workers

For the best protection, get the flu vaccine when it comes out each year in October or November. But even later is better than not at all. It takes 2 weeks for the flu vaccine to take effect, and flu season can last into March or April.

**Keep your distance.** If possible, stay away from people who have a cold or the flu. If you can't—because you're caring for a sick family member, for instance—step up your hand-washing routine and your attention to other defenses against germs.

**Take care of yourself.** Experts think that healthy living may help boost your immune system. So make sure you eat nutritious food, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.

**Stay home if you're contagious.** Sneezing, fever, and a hacking cough are all signs that you could be contagious. Even if you feel all right, your symptoms — or lack thereof — could be deceiving. People with mild illnesses can spread germs, too. If you're unsure whether or not to stay home from school or work, contact your healthcare provider for advice regarding your symptoms.

Sources: WebMD and Healthline.com