



Patient Guide: Preventing Infection

We care about your health. Infections can present a risk to your health. This handout provides you with several things that you can do to avoid getting sick from colds, strep throat, the flu, and other illnesses.

Clean your hands

Cleaning your hands is the most important thing that you can do to prevent illness. Hands should be cleaned before touching, or eating food. Clean them after you use the bathroom, take out the trash, visit someone who is ill, or play with a pet. Clean them after using gym equipment or going to the grocery store. Try to keep from touching your face.

How to practice hand hygiene:

You should use soap and water when hands are visibly dirty, after you use the restroom, and before eating or touching food.

To clean your hands with soap and water:

- Wet hands with warm water.
- Apply soap and rub together for at least 15 seconds.
- Make sure you rub your palms, fingernails, in between fingers, and the backs of your hands.
- Rinse and dry.
- If you are in a public restroom, use a clean paper towel to turn the water off.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are another great way to clean your hands. Use them when your hands do not look dirty.

- Rub sanitizer all over your hands, under your nails and between your fingers until your hands are dry.

Make sure health care providers clean their hands

Doctors, nurses, dentists and other health care providers come into contact with lots of bacteria and viruses. So before they treat you, ask them to clean their hands.

Health care providers should wear gloves when they perform tasks such as taking throat cultures, taking blood, touching wounds or body fluids, or examining your mouth. It's okay to ask your health care provider to wash their hands and ask if they should wear gloves.

Cover your mouth and nose

Many diseases are spread through sneezes and coughs. When you sneeze or cough, the germs can travel 3 feet or more! Cover your mouth and nose to prevent the spread of infection to others.

- Use a tissue. Keep tissues handy at home, at work, and in your pocket. Be sure to throw away used tissues and clean your hands after coughing.
- If you don't have a tissue, cover your mouth and nose with the bend of your elbow or hands. If you sneeze into your hands, clean them right away.
- If you are sick, avoid close contact with others.
- If you are sick, stay away from other people or stay at home. Don't shake hands or touch others.

Keep your cuts and scrapes covered

- If you have a wound, keep it covered to prevent spreading germs to people and things around you.
- Don't share personal items (clothing, towels, razor blades, etc.) with others and encourage your children to do the same.

Get your vaccinations

Make sure that your vaccinations are current – even for adults. Check with your doctor about what shots you may need. Vaccinations are available to prevent:

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|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| • Chicken pox | • Whooping cough
(Pertussis) | • Mumps |
| • Measles | • German measles
(Rubella) | • Diphtheria |
| • Tetanus | • Pneumonia | • Hepatitis |
| • Shingles | | • Meningitis |
| • Flu | | |

This document is based on a document called "Speak Up: Five Things You Can Do to Prevent Infection" from the Joint Commission. It has been revised to include some practices that can reduce infections from organisms that are spread by direct contact. The original document is supported by:

American Hospital Association
www.hospital.com

*Association for Professionals in Infection Control and
Epidemiology*
www.apic.com

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.org

The Joint Commission
www.jointcommission.org

Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
www.shea-online.org