



SCHOOL HEALTH

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FLU HYSTERIA!

As I am sure you have heard there is a shortage of the flu vaccine this year. This news alone has started off a panic across the country. The guidelines that the CDC (Center for Disease Control) has put out limit those who can get the flu shot to:

- those over 65 year and children 6 - 23 months of age
- Adults and children 2 years of age and older with chronic metabolic diseases (including diabetes) kidney diseases, blood disorders (such as sickle cell anemia), or weakened immune systems, including persons with HIV/AIDS
- all women who will be pregnant during the flu season,
- residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities,
- children 6 months – 18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy,
- health care workers in direct patient care
- household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of infants less than 6 months of age.

(The following is taken from
http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/home_work_school.htm.)

How Germs Spread

The main way that illnesses like colds and flu are spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This is called "droplet spread."

This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and are deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Sometimes germs also can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches his or her own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks.

How to Stop the Spread of Germs

In a nutshell: take care to:

- Cover your mouth and nose
- Clean your hands often
- Remind your children to practice healthy habits, too

Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing

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.

The "Happy Birthday" song helps keep your hands clean?

Not exactly. Yet we recommend that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. That's about the same time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice!

Alcohol-Based Hand Wipes and Gel Sanitizers Work Too

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 gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.*

* Source: FDA/CFSAN Food Safety A to Z Reference Guide, September 2001: [Handwashing](#).

Germs and Children

Remind children to practice healthy habits too, because germs spread, especially at school.

The flu has caused high rates of absenteeism among students and staff in our country's 119,000 schools. Influenza is not the only respiratory infection of concern in schools -- nearly 22 million schools days are lost each year to the common cold alone. However, when children practice healthy habits, they miss fewer days of school.
Source: *Am J Infect Control* 2000;28:340-6.

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Stop the Spread of Germs in Schools

Fast Facts

- Approximately 1/5 of the U.S. population attends or works in schools. (*U.S. Dept of Ed, 1999*).
- Some viruses and bacteria can live from 20 minutes up to 2 hours or more on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. (*Ansari, 1988; Scott and Bloomfield, 1989*)
- Nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold alone. (*CDC, 1996*)
- Addressing the spread of germs in schools is essential to the health of our youth, our schools, and our nation.
- Students need to get plenty of sleep and physical activity, drink water, and eat good food to help them stay healthy in the winter and all year.

For more information, visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper> or call the National Immunization Hotline at 1 (800) 232-2522.