

Good health manners

Fact sheet: Tips for preventing the spread of germs

Cough and fever during “cold and flu season” might get you a mask

During the cough, cold and “flu” season, there are some simple tips that will keep respiratory infections from spreading. Respiratory infections affect the nose, throat and lungs. They include influenza (the “flu”), colds, pertussis (whooping cough), and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The germs (viruses and bacteria) that cause these infections are spread from person to person in droplets from the nose, throat and lungs of someone who is sick.

Year-round, you can help stop the spread of these germs by practicing “respiratory etiquette” — good health manners — by covering your nose and mouth every time you sneeze, cough or blow your nose; putting used tissues in the trash; and washing your hands well and often whenever you or someone you are close to is sick. Clinics and hospitals may also give you a face-mask to wear in waiting areas and exam rooms if you have a fever and cough or rash, so be prepared!

Here are some tips to keep from spreading your germs to others, and to keep from catching someone else’s germs.

Keep your germs to yourself:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose.
- Throw out used tissues in the trash as soon as you can.
- Always wash your hands after sneezing, blowing your nose or coughing, or after touching used tissues or handkerchiefs. Wash hands often if you are sick.
- Use warm water and soap, or alcohol-based hand sanitizers, to wash your hands.
- Try to stay home if you have a cough and fever.
- See your doctor as soon as you can if you have a cough and fever, and follow their instructions, including taking medicine as prescribed and getting lots of rest.
- If asked to, use face-masks provided in your doctor’s or clinic waiting room and follow their instructions to help stop the spread of germs.

Keep the germs away:

- Wash your hands before eating and before touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Wash your hands after touching anyone else who is sneezing, coughing, blowing their nose, or whose nose is running.
- Don’t share things like cigarettes, towels, lipstick, toys, or anything else that might be contaminated with respiratory germs.
- Don’t share food, utensils or beverage containers with others.

For more information, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) flu website at www.cdc.gov/flu and the N.C. Division of Public Health’s “Keep Illness from Spreading” page at www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/gcdc/infectioncontrol.html.