

How clean are your hands?

Have you ever blown your nose or coughed into your hands and then typed on a keyboard, picked up a phone, opened a door, or picked up your child's toys? Have you ever shaken someone's hand and unconsciously touched your face, not stopping to think what germs they just shared with you? Do you think about what your hands have touched before you eat a sandwich or make your child's lunch?

With the flu season getting underway, it is important to be vigilant in preventing the spread of germs. Just because you cannot see germs, that doesn't mean they are not on your hands or anything your hands touch.

Viruses can be transferred from a dry smooth surface up to 20 minutes after being contaminated. E. Coli, salmonella and other bacteria can live up to two hours on surfaces like doorknobs, keyboards, and tables. Viruses can travel on droplets through the air when you sneeze or cough. Bacteria doubles in number every 20 minutes. Five bacteria in a sandwich at noon will total over 10 million by 7 p.m. After three days, with no bacteria dying, there would be enough to cover the earth.

What does that mean for you? It means spreading illness to coworkers and friends, and then bringing it home to your own families. For small children, infants, elderly, and people with compromised immune systems, bacteria and viruses can make them very ill, can cause long illnesses, and even death. For others, it could mean missing work, children missing school, trips to the clinic or hospital, and parents or grandparents getting sick, especially those whose health is ailing.

How can you do your part in keeping yourself, your family, and your friends healthy? Here are a few tips for the home and work environments:

- Sneeze or cough into your elbow, shoulder, or tissue. Don't reuse tissues.
- Wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands! Clean hands prevent infections and help stop the spread of illnesses.
- Use the hand sanitizers when available – these require less time than hand washing and kill germs on your hands. If you do use hand sanitizers, keep bottles out of reach of small children.
- Periodically clean surfaces like tables, desks, keyboards, phones, and other areas that are frequently touched with an alcohol-based cloth or wipe.
- Avoid touching your face or eyes with your hands unless you have just washed them.
- Encourage your family and friends to keep their hands clean.

Keeping yourself and your family healthy is important, especially in the upcoming flu season. The CDC recommends everyone older than 6 months get the flu shot this year, so encourage your family and friends to get immunized.

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/curricula/curriculumadult.pdf>

Additional Resources:

[Hand Washing](#)
[Hand Sanitizing](#)
[Influenza \(Flu\)](#)