Everyday Preventive Actions That Can Help Fight Germs, Like Flu

CDC recommends a three-step approach to fighting the flu.

CDC recommends a three-step approach to fighting influenza (flu). The first and most important step is to get a flu vaccination each year. But if you get the flu, there are prescription antiviral drugs that can treat your illness. Early treatment is especially important for the elderly, the very young, people with certain chronic health conditions, and pregnant women. Finally, everyday preventive actions may slow the spread of germs that cause respiratory (nose, throat, and lungs) illnesses, like flu. This flyer contains information about everyday preventive actions.

How does the flu spread?

Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person through droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. Flu viruses also may spread when people touch something with flu virus on it and then touch their mouth, eyes, or nose. Many other viruses spread these ways too.

People infected with flu may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days **after** becoming sick. That means you may be able to spread the flu to someone else before you know you are sick as well as while you are sick. Young children, those who are severely ill, and those who have severely weakened immune systems may be able to infect others for longer than 5-7 days.

What are everyday preventive actions?

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you or your child gets sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you (or your child) stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.
- If an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs, follow public health advice. This may include information about how to increase distance between people and other measures.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases

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What additional steps can I take at work to help stop the spread of germs that can cause respiratory illness, like flu?

- Find out about your employer's plans if an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs and whether flu vaccinations are offered on-site.
- Routinely clean frequently touched objects and surfaces, including doorknobs, keyboards, and phones, to help remove germs.
- Make sure your workplace has an adequate supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs, and disposable wipes.
- Train others on how to do your job so they can cover for you in case you or a family member gets sick and you have to stay home.
- If you begin to feel sick while at work, go home as soon as possible.

What additional preventive actions can I take to protect my child from germs that can cause respiratory illness, like flu?

- Find out about plans your child's school, child care program, or college has if an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs and whether flu vaccinations are offered on-site.
- Make sure your child's school, child care program, or college routinely cleans frequently touched objects and surfaces, and that they have a good supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs, and disposable wipes on-site.
- Ask how sick students and staff are separated from others and who will care for them until they can go home.

Everyday preventive actions can help slow the spread of germs that can cause many different illnesses and may offer some protection against the flu.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.

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