

Preventing Respiratory Infections

- When germs (pathogens) such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites (protozoa, worms) enter your body and multiply, they can cause infection, illness, and organ and tissue damage, and endanger your health.
- **Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent infection.**
- No matter how careful you are, you may still get an infection but it is wise to reduce your risk as much as possible.

Germs that cause respiratory infections can spread in a number of ways. They can be forced out of an infected person as *droplets* when they cough, sneeze, sing, yell, etc. These droplets fall to the ground or onto nearby surfaces (called fomites) within a few feet of the person expelling them. Other germs, called *aerosols*, are so small that gravity doesn't affect them and they float around on the air currents in a room. Good ventilation can decrease the number of aerosol germs and lessen the risk that people in that room will get sick. On the flip side, if the germs are in droplets or on surfaces, good ventilation doesn't have the same beneficial effects of lowering the risk of illness for folks in the room.

Because of variables like the size of the pathogen, how it travels, how it enters the human body, and the strength of an individual's immune system, there are number of different precautions you can take to lower your risk of infection and illness.

What can you do? Wash Your Hands!

When

- before eating, drinking, or taking medication
- after using the bathroom, coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
- before touching your eyes, nose, mouth, contact lenses
- before and after performing any care with bandages, catheters, or IV lines
- after touching things in your environment that are often touched by others

Washing the most effective way

- Vigorously wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. (Hot water can dry your skin.)
- Use liquid soap or bar soap. Rub your hands together for 20 seconds. Wash your thumbs, in between your fingers, the back of your hands, and under fingernails.
- Rinse well with warm water. If soap stays on your skin, it can make you itchy.
- Pat your hands dry with a paper towel. And use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.
- If soap and water are unavailable or your hands are not visibly dirty, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer instead of washing.



Practice good personal hygiene

Your skin is your body's first line of defense against infection.

- Bathe or shower regularly and use a mild soap. Use a clean towel every day. Do not share towels.
- Examine your skin closely for rashes, redness, cuts that are not healing, or areas of irritation.
- Clean and care for any small cuts or tears in your skin.
- Wear shoes to protect your feet.
- [Use skin moisturizers and lip balm to prevent chafing and dry, cracked skin.](#) Even the tiniest skin opening can be a point of entry for germs!

Mouth Care

- Brush your teeth with a fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day.
- Consider using an electric toothbrush.
- Use a mouth rinse or mouthwash twice a day. **Be sure it does not contain alcohol.** (Check the label.) Alcohol can dry out the tissues in your mouth.
- Get regular dental screenings to take care of cavities while small and protect gum and teeth health. Broken teeth, gum disease, and tooth decay are all open doors for germs.
- Limit your sugar intake.
- Stop smoking and using any tobacco products.



Do Deep Breathing Exercises

Anxiety and stress can make us take short, shallow breaths. Shallow breathing does not allow enough oxygen to enter our bodies, which can increase anxiety. As you practice deep breathing, imagine a peaceful setting.

- ✓ Take in a deep breath.
- ✓ Hold the breath for several seconds.
- ✓ Exhale slowly.
- ✓ Repeat 1-2 more times.



Care for Your Immune System

- Avoid people who are sick and large (or close) crowds.
- Walk as much as you can, unless your doctor says otherwise.
- Get plenty of rest. Fatigue can stress your immune system.
- Eat a well-balanced diet with nutritious foods. Avoid processed foods.
- Thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables. Do not eat raw meat, seafood, or eggs. Unsure if a food has spoiled? If in doubt – throw it out!
- Talk with your primary doctor about vaccinations to help prevent illnesses such as COVID, flu, pneumonia, and shingles. Encourage people in your household to get vaccinated too.