

Preventing colds and flu

Objective

Know the basics for preventing infectious diseases, such as colds or flu.

Background: Children are efficient germ carriers. A few simple changes may help prevent the spread of disease in the classroom—and to co-workers and family.

Ask: What's the difference between a cold and the flu?

Share: Cold viruses are carried from our noses and mouths in tiny moisture droplets that typically fall out of the air onto surfaces within about a 3-foot radius. These viruses can live for several hours, plenty of time to be picked up and spread. We commonly pick up the virus on our hands and then unconsciously touch our nose, mouth, or eyes, where it has a good chance of making us ill. There's no vaccine for the common cold, and antibiotics are ineffective. Fortunately, colds usually pass in about a week.

Seasonal influenza, or the flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and even lead to death. It is spread the same way as a cold, but the virus changes every year and has a specific season. The flu season typically starts in the fall, around late September, peaks in January and February, and is over by the end of March or a little later. Only a lab test can verify if an illness is the flu.

Ask: What's our best protection against the flu?

Share: Vaccination in September is the best protection, but we can get the vaccine anytime during flu season. It takes a couple of weeks to develop immunity. This is one reason people sometimes mistakenly believe that the vaccine "causes" the flu.

Getting vaccinated isn't enough. Most healthy adults may infect others from one day before symptoms develop up to seven days after becoming sick. Young children and people with weakened immune systems may be infectious even longer.

Ask: What else can we do?



Note

Download these posters to help prevent the spread of colds and flu. (Or order through your assigned safety consultant.)

Be a workplace flu fighter
bit.ly/3xOHpNF

Hans Washer
bit.ly/3Y4lGfo

Maxine Vaccine
bit.ly/3Zl8sfc

Share: Fortunately, the measures we take to protect ourselves from the flu are also effective against many other communicable diseases, including the common cold:

- 1. Avoid close contact.**
A 3-foot distance is ideal, but not always practical. Since exhaled droplets are the culprits, turning your head away from exhaled air can help.
- 2. Stay home when you're sick.**
If you have flu-like symptoms, stay home for 24 hours after fever (100° F) has passed without medication.
- 3. Cough or sneeze into your elbow.**
If you use a tissue, dispose of it promptly and wash your hands.

- 4. Wash your hands and wrists often.**
Use soap and running water, and wash long enough to sing Happy Birthday twice. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60 percent alcohol. Leave it on until dry to kill the germs.
- 5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.**
- 6. Practice other good health habits.**
Clean frequently touched surfaces, especially when someone is ill. To keep your immune system working well, get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

Ask: Any safety concerns or suggestions?

