

Fighting Germs

Many lung and breathing illnesses are highly contagious -- the germs that cause the flu and common cold, for example, are easily spread from one person to another. Researchers believe about 80% of common respiratory (lung and breathing) illnesses are spread by our hands. There are many simple things you can do to fight germs and lessen your chance of getting sick. Here's the most important: what you can do:

Wash your hands properly and often

Washing your hands properly with regular soap and water is a proven way to stop the spread of many contagious viruses, including colds and flu. [Learn to wash your hands right](#), and teach your friends and family to do the same.

Washing your hands properly is a good way to prevent many contagious diseases.

- Take off any jewelry
- Wet your hands with warm water
- Apply soap
- Scrub with soap all over your hands and under your nails for 20 seconds (sing "Happy Birthday")
- Rinse for 10 seconds under warm water
- Dry hands completely with a paper towel
- Turn tap off with a paper towel (don't use your bare hand, or your hand could get germs on it)

You should wash your hands:

- Before and after you eat or prepare food
- After you use the bathroom or change diapers
- After you blow your nose, sneeze or cough into your sleeve
- Before and after taking care of someone who is sick

Cough and sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve

Viruses are commonly spread through sneezing and coughing. Viruses live in the saliva and mucus in our noses and throats - when we sneeze or cough, we spray these infected droplets into the air. When other people breathe in or touch these infected droplets with their hands they can get sick.

- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, throw the tissue away, and wash your hands.
- If you don't have a tissue, turn away and cough into your sleeve or the crook of your elbow. Then, wash your hands.

Get your shots (immunizations)

Shots (immunizations) offer the best protection against many diseases, including flu and pneumonia. The American Lung Association recommends: Most people over 6 months old should [get the flu shot](#)

Most people with COPD and asthma should also [get a pneumonia shot](#)

Keep your home and work space clean

Clean your home and work spaces *regularly*. Don't use antibacterial cleaners, because using them may increase antibiotic resistance (when germs become stronger).

Stay away from sick people

If you have a long-term lung disease like asthma or COPD, you are especially at risk of getting sick from contagious respiratory illnesses. If you're at risk, avoid spending time with people who are sick.

For example, if you have COPD, you may be eager to visit your grand-daughter who has the flu. But it's safer to wait until she feels better before you visit. Catching the flu or a cold can make your COPD or asthma much worse and it can take a long time to recover.

If you are sick, stay away from other people

If you have a contagious sickness like the flu or a cold, do your best to stay away from other people, especially those who are:

- very young (babies and children)
- frail or have a chronic (long-term) illness
- have a lung disease like asthma or COPD
- pregnant
- elderly

If you have a lung disease like asthma or COPD, follow your action plan

If you feel your symptoms getting worse, follow your doctor's instructions in your [asthma action plan](#) or [COPD action plan](#).