

COVER YOUR COUGH & CLEAN YOUR HANDS

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No one likes to be sick with a cold or other respiratory illness, but avoiding respiratory illness during any season can be a challenge. People with increased stress in their lives, individuals with weakened immune systems and households with children are especially at risk. However, simple hygiene practices can go a long way toward preventing illnesses such as the common cold and respiratory illness. "The following are some ways to lower your risk of catching colds, coughs or respiratory illness, but if you become ill, there's also some good advice on how to get better soon," says Jan Chytilo, Director of Health Education for the Broome County Health Department.

Keep your lifestyle as healthy as possible. A nutritious well-balanced diet, plenty of rest, and regular exercise makes it easier for your body to resist infection, including respiratory illness. Don't smoke. Non-smokers get fewer colds, coughs, sore throats and flu.

Reduce your risk of infection by washing your hands more often. Using warm water and soap removes germs better than a quick rinse under the cold tap. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands – these are all ways that germs can get into your body. Always wash your hands after:

- Blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- Going to the bathroom
- Before and after eating
- After contact with or being near someone who is ill
- Before and after handling and preparing food
- After touching animals

It's very easy to catch cold and or respiratory illness germs from things other people have touched, such as telephones, door handles, or money. Avoid touching other people's used tissues or handkerchiefs. Use disposable tissues and throw them away after each use. Because the viruses that cause these infections are coughed and sneezed into the air you share with other people, it helps to stay away from people who are ill, and to avoid enclosed crowded places when possible.

If you are sick with a cold or respiratory illness, you can stop the spread of germs that make you and others sick by practicing the following respiratory etiquette/hand hygiene strategies:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands
- Put your used tissue in the waste basket
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Wash them with soap and water or clean them with alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- If your sickness warrants a visit to the doctor's office or hospital emergency room, inform healthcare personnel of symptoms of respiratory infection. In order to prevent the spread of infection, you may be asked to wear a mask to contain respiratory secretions and to sit at least three feet away from others in a common sitting area.

To further keep germs from spreading, teach children and other household members these respiratory etiquette/hand hygiene practices.

The best treatment for cold and respiratory illness is rest. Stay home from work or school if you are sick to avoid passing the illness to others. Drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated. Although there are no drugs to cure colds and some infections, your health care provider can recommend medications to relieve symptoms.

Remember: The best line of defense is washing your hands!

For more information on reducing your risk of contracting or spreading respiratory illness contact your health care provider, or call the Broome County Health Department at 778-3944 during regular business hours. Visit the Broome County Government website at www.gobroomecounty.com/safety and click on Information Line to see a written version of this information.