



NEWS



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Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases *Tips to help protect against nasty cold and flu germs*

BLOOMINGTON, IL- Take action to protect yourself and your family from the flu and colds and make the holiday season one that is truly merry and bright. Prevention is the key. Says Melissa Graven, Communicable Disease Supervisor at the McLean County Health Department, “The holidays are a busy time and it’s all too easy to forget about taking care of yourself as you rush from store-to-store or party-to-party. While a flu shot is undeniably your best protection against seasonal flu, if you add to that a few good health practices, you can dramatically increase your odds of staying healthy this cold and flu season.”

Just what are these healthy practices? We asked our public health nurses for their top 10 tips and here’s what they said:

1. Get a flu shot. It’s not too late to get vaccinated against the flu. The health department would be happy to help, as would your healthcare provider or many local pharmacies.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use 20 seconds as your guide for how long you should scrub your hands in warm soapy water. If soap and water isn’t available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are a good substitute.
3. Disinfect frequently touched surfaces. Cold and flu germs love to live on surfaces. Use disinfectant wipes or soap and water to clean surfaces like door knobs, light switches, computer keyboards, phones, desk tops and other potentially contaminated surfaces.
4. Avoid sick people. It’s called social distancing. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. People with the flu can spread it to others as far away as about six feet, mainly by droplets made when they cough, sneeze, or talk.
5. Get enough sleep. Help prevent your immune system from getting run down by making sure you’re getting adequate sleep. On average, adults need seven to eight hours of sleep per night, children need even more.

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6. Make time to exercise. Exercise boosts the immune system, increasing your body's ability to fight off infection.
7. Drink plenty of fluids, but limit alcohol intake. Fluids, like water, flush your system and keep you hydrated during the dry winter months. Alcohol is not only dehydrating, it can also affect how your immune system functions if you drink too much of it.
8. Avoid sharing food, drinks, and eating utensils. You may be sharing germs and viruses along with your food and drink.
9. Eat nutritious foods. Foods rich in vitamins A, C, and E such as milk, citrus fruits, vegetables, nuts, and eggs can strengthen your immune system.
10. Manage stress. Emotional stress can take a toll on your immune system and make you more likely to catch a cold. Step away from the flurry of activity the holiday season brings and take time to enjoy activities that relax you and help you maintain inner peace.

If you are taking precautions but still wind up with a cold or flu, take time to rest and recover -- your body will thank you and your family, friends, co-workers, and classmates will thank you. You will get better faster and reduce the chances of passing your illness to those around you if you stay home and rest.

The McLean County Health Department is dedicated to the prevention and control of disease through health promotion, early intervention and health protection within our county. For more information about influenza and vaccinations, visit the health department's website at: <http://health.mcleancountyil.gov/>. You can also follow us on Twitter (@McLeanHealth) and "Like" us on Facebook (Facebook.com/McLeanHealth), for information about public health affecting you.

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Side Piece - Influenza

Learn the difference between cold symptoms and the flu in order to get better faster!

- ✓ If it's a cold: sore throat, mild chills, slight body aches, runny nose, mucus-producing cough, mild chest discomfort.
- ✓ Treatment: antihistamines, decongestants, and pain reliever.
- ✓ If it's the flu: fever, severe chills and body aches, fatigue, mild sniffles, dry cough, severe chest discomfort.
Treatment: antiviral medications; see your doctor!

The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease - vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous or "sick to your stomach" are rarely the main symptoms of influenza.

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