
Preventing Colds, Flu, and Respiratory Infections



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- ◆ Describe why older adults are at higher risk of getting sick.
- ◆ Explain why handwashing is a critical part of preventing sickness.
- ◆ Wash your hands thoroughly using the Centers for Disease Control's 5 steps to handwashing.

As we get older, our immune system changes. It is harder for older adults to fight off illness or to recover from illness. Older adults and people who have chronic health conditions are at increased risk for colds, flu, and respiratory infections.

Colds, flu, and respiratory infections are caused by germs. Germs typically spread from person-to-person through coughing, sneezing, or coming into contact with other body fluids. You can't see the germs that make you sick, so it is important to take precautions to keep you and your loved one safe.

What can family caregivers do to keep their loved ones safe?

Precautions for older adults are often similar to the recommendations for everyone else. However, because older adults are at higher risk of getting sick, it is critical to always take these recommendations seriously.

One important recommendation is to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. It is recommended that you use your elbow to cover your mouth and nose. This prevents any germs that you are carrying from spreading outside of your own personal space.

One of the most important recommendations is to wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. This prevents you from spreading germs to your loved one. It also protects you, by reducing the risk of the germs entering your mouth, nose, or eyes.

You can also speak with your loved one's health care team to see if they are up to date on their immunizations or vaccines. Immunizations can help your loved one fight off some types of germs.

Why is handwashing so important?

Washing your hands is one of the most effective ways to keep you and your loved one safe from illness. If you have germs on your hands and you touch surfaces in your house like doorknobs or light switches, those germs can end up on your loved one's hands. Hand washing stops the spreading of germs.

When should you wash your hands?

You should wash your hands often throughout the day. Some specific examples of times you need to wash your hands include:

- ◆ After you cough or sneeze
- ◆ Before and after preparing food
- ◆ Before and after eating
- ◆ After petting animals
- ◆ After using the toilet or assisting someone else
- ◆ Before and after assisting with personal care



5 Steps for Handwashing

These are the steps recommended by the CDC:

1. **Wet** your hands with clean, running water, turn off the tap, and apply soap.
2. **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
3. **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the Happy Birthday song from beginning to end twice.
4. **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
5. **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

If soap and water are not available, you can also use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Make sure you wash every part of your hands, including your fingertips, the side of your hands, and the back of your hands. These areas often carry germs, and they are commonly missed during routine handwashing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has more resources available about hand washing. For more information, you can look on their website, or contact your local Department of Public Health or Health Services.



QUIZ

1. Last year, Jeanne's 85 year old mother got sick with the flu and was admitted to the the hospital. Her mother recovered, and is back at home. Jeanne wonders why her mother got so sick, and wants to prevent it from happening again.

Why might Jeanne's 85-year old mother be at higher risk for colds and flus? Select the best answer.

- A. She is exposed to more germs.
 - B. It may be harder for her immune system to fight off germs.
 - C. She is not aware of the risk of germs.
 - D. It may be harder for germs to enter her immune system.
2. What advice would you give Jeanne to help her prevent her mother from getting sick? Select all that apply.
 - A. Use your elbow to cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
 - B. Always wear gloves when providing your mother with care.
 - C. Look for germs on your hands.
 - D. Wash your hands frequently.
 3. When should Jeanne wash her hands? Select all that apply.
 - A. Before and after eating.
 - B. After using the toilet.
 - C. Before and after assisting with personal care.
 - D. After petting an animal.

(Continued)



QUIZ

4. What is the correct order of the 5 Steps of Hand Washing? Select the best answer.
- A. Rinse, Lather, Wet, Scrub, Dry
 - B. Dry, Wet, Lather, Scrub, Rinse
 - C. Wet, Lather, Scrub, Rinse, Dry
 - D. Scrub, Lather, Wet, Dry, Rinse

Answers: 1. B, 2. A, D, 3. A-D, 4. C