



Cover Your Cough, Then Go Sing "Happy Birthday"

By Merilla Hopkins, Lincoln Hospital Pharmacist

Information provided by the CDC



During this year of extreme flu vaccine shortage, prevention becomes more important than ever. In the United States, one out of five of us venture out of the home each day to school, work, or day care. Since person to person contact is unavoidable, it is crucial that we all take steps to stop the spread of germs to prevent ourselves from getting infected, as well as preventing ourselves from infecting others.

Illnesses like the flu and colds are caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. The flu and colds usually spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Steps to help you get through Flu Season.

Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough. Try to use a tissue that you can throw away. If one is not available, cover your cough or sneeze with your hands. Be sure to wash your hands **EACH TIME**, after you cough or sneeze.

Clean your hands often. Wash your hands with warm soap and water while rubbing them vigorously together to help dislodge and remove germs. Each hand washing should take 15-20 seconds which is about the time it takes to sing "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" twice. What a great way to teach your kids how to practice proper hand washing technique.

Use alcohol based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers when soap and water are not available. You can find these in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry. The gel doesn't need water to work, the alcohol kills germs that cause colds and the flu.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. Germs can live for a long time (some can live for 2 hours or more) on surfaces like doorknobs, desks, and tables.

When you are sick or have flu symptoms, stay home, get plenty of rest, and check with your health care provider as needed. Remember, keeping your distance from others may protect them from getting sick. Common symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches and
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (much more common among children than adults)

Antivirals are available. Antivirals are medications that can be taken within the first 48 hours of onset of influenza symptoms to help reduce the severity and length of illness. The CDC is recommending these medications be reserved for patients who are at high risk for serious complications of influenza. Contact your healthcare provider if you feel you are coming down with the flu and have had symptoms for less than 48 hours.

Keeping yourself healthy during flu and cold season is also an important piece of the puzzle. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Practicing healthy habits will help you stay healthy during flu season and all year long.

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