

Extension Update

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Wipe Out Those Cold and Flu Germs

Although a clean bathroom is a benefit to good health anytime of the year, during cold and flu season it's particularly important to be vigilant about germs.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the period when an infected person is contagious depends on the age and health of the person.

Studies show that most healthy adults may be able to infect others 24 hours prior to and three to five days after symptoms start.

Young children and people with weakened immune systems may be contagious for longer than a week.

Once someone is exposed to the virus, the length of time it takes for symptoms to appear varies from one to four days, with an average of about two days.

Although cold and flu viruses primarily spread from person-to-person contact, you can also become infected from contact with contaminated surfaces. The best way to avoid becoming infected with a cold or flu is to wash your hands frequently with soap and water or with an alcohol-based sanitizer.

If another member of your household is sick, extra vigilance is required. The length of time that cold or flu germs can survive outside the body on an environmental surface, such as a doorknob, varies greatly. But the suspected range is from a few seconds to 48 hours, depending on the specific virus and the type of surface.

- If there is more than one bathroom in the home, assign one exclusively to the sick person.
- Be sure all bathroom sinks, as well as the kitchen sink, are well stocked with soap and paper towels. Single use towels, like paper towels, reduce the spread of germs.
- Add disinfectant wipes to your next-to-the-sink items. Encourage family members to use them to wipe down faucet handles and doorknobs.
- Put alcohol-based sanitizers and disinfectant wipes in the bedroom, the home office, the family room, anywhere the sick person is spending time.
- Since dry skin is often a by-product of dry weather and heated homes, a hand sanitizer with moisturizer can kill germs as well as help keep hands soft.

There is still time to get a flu shot. The CDC recommends an annual flu vaccine for everyone six months of age and older. The flu vaccine has many benefits and it is the best way to reduce your risk of flu and its potentially serious consequences. Get vaccinated now!

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