

Germs and You Background Information

We are constantly exposed to microorganisms, both good and bad. Most of the microorganisms we come into contact with during our daily lives are harmless. Some even help keep us healthy. But certain microorganisms can pose real health hazards when in the wrong place. We call these harmful microorganisms "germs."

Some exposure to germs can help to build up our immune systems, helping us to fight infections and stay healthy. Exposure to other germs, however, can cause food poisoning, sickness, and diarrhea. So it makes sense to practice the good hygiene and cleanliness that will prevent these problems.

Examples of Micro-organisms

Bacteria: Salmonella and E. coli bacteria can cause food poisoning.

Viruses: Rhinoviruses can cause colds. Herpes simplex causes cold sores. Influenza can cause the Flu.

Fungi: Trichophyton can cause Athlete's Foot.

Parasites: Giardia can cause diarrhea.

Where Are Germs Found?

The main sources of germs in our homes are people, pets, and food. Germs live all around us-in soil, air, water, food, animals, plants and people. Germs and dirt can be found throughout the home. Whether it is the dog or the kids running through the house; or cooking up dinner for your family who can't sit down for 5 minutes - there's mud and grime, food stains and grease as well as illness-causing germs like bacteria such as Salmonella and Escherichia coli.

Practice healthy habits to stop getting germs or spreading germs at home, school, or work. Simple actions, like covering your mouth and nose and washing your hands often, can stop germs and prevent illnesses and reduce sick days. Keep common surfaces such as countertops, doorknobs, and telephones sanitized with disinfectants such as LYSOL® Sanitizing Wipes.

Bacteria can grow and divide every 20 minutes. One single bacteria cell can become more than 8 million cells in less than 24 hours.

Did You Know?

Good personal and home hygiene are essential to keeping germs at bay. However, there are several other important things you can do to reduce the risk of infection:

- Prompt immunizations can prevent very serious diseases such as measles, rubella, chicken pox, mumps, polio, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus and hepatitis B Virus. For more information, speak to your healthcare provider, or read more about Immunizations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov>.
- A balanced diet provides your immune system with the fuels it needs to fight infections.
- Leading a healthy lifestyle can boost your immune system and help keep you free from disease.

How Do We Get Infections?

By understanding when and where there is potential for germs to spread, we can take steps to help avoid infection. To cause disease, germs need to get inside the body. Since germs do not jump or walk, they have to be transported into the body by other means:

- Inhalation of small particles, dust, and water droplets into the respiratory tract via the nose and mouth. Influenza, measles, and tuberculosis are transmitted this way.
- Ingestion of contaminated food and water. Salmonella is transmitted this way.
- Inoculation via injury, injection, bites, and wounds to the skin and mucous membranes. Hepatitis B, staphylococcus, and tetanus are transmitted this way.
- Sexual contact between partners. Gonorrhea, herpes simplex type 2, and HIV are transmitted this way.

Many infections are spread by indirect contact, when germs are transferred from a contaminated item (cutting board, cleaning cloth, door handle, telephone, TV remote, etc.) by our hands to our body.

Hand washing is the key to significantly reducing the spread of germs. Because our hands touch many surfaces in the course of a day, they are prime vehicles for transferring germs to our nose, mouth, and eyes, or to other surfaces where they can find their way into another person. That's why it's so important to wash our hands thoroughly and frequently.

Who Is Most at Risk?

In most healthy people, infections are short-lived when they are treated properly. However, in individuals whose immune systems are vulnerable, infections can have severe consequences. Susceptible people include the following:

- The very young — Babies and children under the age of five are more susceptible, because their immune systems are still developing.

- The elderly — The immune system deteriorates with age.
- The ill — Disease weakens the immune system further.

How to Reduce Your Risks

We can't make any environment germ-free — nor is it necessary. To keep our families healthy, we just need to reduce the risks of infection where and when germs are likely to spread. There are several ways to remove or destroy germs in your home:

Washing — Often you can remove sufficient germs from an item using detergent and hot water, but you must wipe or scrub the item to loosen the dirt and germs, then rinse thoroughly under running water. This method is suitable for decontaminating items such as pots and pans, cutlery, and your hands.

Heating — Cooking food thoroughly will reduce the number of germs in food to a level that makes it safe to eat. Generally, the higher the temperature reached, the more germs are killed.

Disinfecting — Disinfectant cleaners are ideal for killing germs on surfaces throughout the home such as kitchen counters, sinks, toilets, and bathroom tile. You can also use LYSOL® Disinfectant Sprays to eliminate germs and odors on hard, nonporous surfaces that you come into contact with every day, such as doorknobs, toilet areas, and telephones.

Drying — Germs cannot live long on a clean, dry surface, but they love moisture. Remember that re-using damp dirty items such as cleaning cloths, towels, and mops can easily spread germs around your home.

Always remember these tips:

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for using cleaning products.
- Store cleaning products and other chemicals safely out of reach of children.
- Get all members of your family involved in establishing a regular cleaning routine for your home.

Hand Washing

Simple hand washing is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of germs — whether you are at home or out and about. Every time we touch something or someone, we can transfer germs to and from our hands. After that, it's easy for germs to pass into our bodies when we touch our mouth, eyes, or nose. Washing removes most germs from our hands.

Did You Know?

A thorough washing will remove most germs from your hands. For effective hand washing:

- Wet your hands under warm running water.
- Apply a small amount of liquid soap.

- Cover all surfaces of your hands with soap and water, rubbing vigorously.
- Rinse with clean running water.
- Dry hands thoroughly, using paper towels or a clean towel.

Teaching children about the importance of hand washing is a great way to help keep your family healthy. [Download and print](#) a kid-friendly poster that playfully illustrates the "Why," "When," and "How" of hand washing.

If we remember to wash our hands at certain important times during the day, we can substantially reduce our chances of becoming ill:

- Before eating or preparing food
- Immediately after handling raw foods, such as poultry
- After visiting the toilet or changing a diaper
- After contact with blood or body fluids (e.g., vomit, nasal secretions, saliva)
- After touching animals or their toys and leashes
- After touching a contaminated area (e.g., trash can, cleaning cloth, drain, soil)
- Before dressing a wound, giving medicines, or inserting contact lenses
- Whenever hands look dirty

Personal Hygiene

Foul-smelling body odor occurs when stale sweat is allowed to remain on your skin and in your clothing. Bacterial skin infections, conjunctivitis, and fungal infections are all associated with poor personal hygiene. Keeping your body clean reduces the risk of cross-infection and self-infection, and prevents other problems such as body odor, tooth decay, and bad breath. Here are some basic hygiene procedures to follow daily:

Bathing

- Wash your whole body with soap and water every day. Dry your skin well to help prevent fungal infections, soreness, and chapping which could lead to bacterial infection if the skin is scratched.

Dressing

- Change underwear, socks, and hosiery daily.
- Regularly change and launder clothes.
- Regularly change and launder towels, face cloths, and bed linen.

Grooming

- Brush your teeth twice a day, including just before you go to bed.
- Wash and comb/brush your hair regularly.
- Keep nails short and clean.

- Use tissues to wipe your nose and to cover your mouth and nose when you are coughing or sneezing.
- Carefully dispose of tissues and other items soiled with blood or body fluids (e.g. bandages).
- Don't share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, or cosmetics.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

If you have body odor or bad breath that persists despite good hygiene, ask your doctor for advice.

Did You Know?

Every time you sneeze, millions of germs leave your body at up to 80 miles per hour. Coughs and sneezes do spread diseases. Remember to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.