Coughing and Sneezing

Covering coughs and sneezes and keeping hands clean can help prevent the spread of serious respiratory illnesses like influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), whooping cough, and COVID-19. Germs can be easily spread by:

* Coughing, sneezing, or talking.
* Touching your face with unwashed hands after touching contaminated surfaces or objects
* Touching surfaces or objects that may be frequently touched by other people.

To help stop the spread of germs:

* Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
* Throw used tissues in the trash.
* If you don’t have a tissue, cough, or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.

Remember to immediately [wash your hands](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html) after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.

Washing your hands is one of the most effective ways to prevent yourself and your loved ones from getting sick, especially at [key times](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html#keyTimes) when you are likely to get and spread germs.

* Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
* If soap and water are not readily available, [use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/hand-sanitizer-use.html) that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean hands



Teach patients how to cover their coughs and sneezes.

For information about preventing the spread of COVID-19, see CDC’s [COVID-19: Prevent Getting Sick](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html) web page.

**To help prevent the spread of respiratory disease, you can also avoid close contact with people who are sick**. If you are ill, you should try to distance yourself from others, so you do not spread your germs. Distancing includes staying home from work or school when possible.