

COVER YOUR COUGH

Respiratory Etiquette

Nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold alone. (CDC, 1996) The flu has caused high rates of absenteeism among students and staff in our country's 119,000 schools. Influenza is not the only respiratory infection of concern in schools -- nearly 22 million schools days are lost each year to the common cold alone. However, when children practice healthy habits, they miss fewer days of school (CDC).

Helping to prevent the spread of colds or the flu, can be accomplished simply by the techniques explained below.

How Do Germs Spread?

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) explains the main way that illnesses like colds and flu are spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This is called "droplet spread."

This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and are deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Sometimes germs also can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches his or her own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks.

What Can We Do?

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread this way.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

Stay home when you are sick.