

5 Steps to Flu Prevention

By William Sears, M.D.



1. WARD OFF GERMS

Most flu germs are spread in two ways: touching (such as hand-to-hand contact) or droplet spread (meaning the germs are sneezed or coughed into the air and inhaled by a nearby unsuspecting person). To avoid person-to-person spread:

- Avoid shaking hands. Instead, bow or give a head nod.
- Stop kids from nose-picking. The nose is a breeding ground for germs and often the first place germs camp out. Children often pick their noses, rub their eyes and then touch someone else.
- Sneeze into a tissue and teach children to sneeze into the inside of their elbow (not their hands).
- Avoid coughers and sneezers as much as possible.
- Avoid crowded rooms, and go outdoors as much as possible.



2. KEEP HANDS CLEAN

Besides breathing in germs, the next most important route of entry is on the hands. Place antibacterial hand wipes, such as Wet Ones® Antibacterial Wipes around the house, in lunchboxes and in coat and jean pockets. Wet Ones® Antibacterial Wipes are proven to be just as effective as gel hand sanitizer in killing 99.99 percent of germs, but they also clean away dirt and messes and won't dry out skin like alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Show children how to use hand wipes and tell them they help keep germs from getting into the body and making them sick. The frequent use of antibacterial hand wipes, especially during flu season, plants an important life-long health habit into a child's growing memory.

3. EAT IMMUNE-BOOSTING FOODS

The best way to boost the immune system, especially during flu season, is to eat more immune-boosting foods. The best foods to build a strong immune system are fruits, vegetables, seafood and yogurt.

- Apples
- Apricots
- Bell peppers
- Blueberries
- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Chili peppers
- Flax oil
- Flax seeds (ground)
- Grapefruit (pink)
- Grapes (red, purple)
- Guava
- Legumes (beans, peas, lentils)
- Mango
- Melons
- Nuts
- Olive oil
- Onion
- Oranges
- Papaya
- Pomegranate (and pomegranate juice)
- Prunes
- Salmon (wild)
- Spices (turmeric, cinnamon)
- Spinach
- Squash
- Strawberries
- Sweet potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Vinegar

Avoid too many sweets. Equally as important as eating more immune-boosting foods is reducing sugar intake. Eating or drinking 8 teaspoons of sugar (the equivalent of 2½, 12-ounce cans of soda) can reduce the ability of white blood cells to kill germs by 40 percent. The immune-suppressing effects of sugar start less than 30 minutes after ingestion and may last for five hours. Adults should also avoid excessive alcohol. Like sugar, when consumed in excess, alcohol can reduce the ability of white blood cells to kill germs.

4. CLEAR THE NOSE AND SINUSES

Flu germs often settle first in the nose and sinuses, so it's important to keep nasal passages clear with either a "nose hose" or a "steam clean."

Hose the nose with saltwater nose drops (½ teaspoon of salt to 8 ounces of water) or ready-made saltwater (saline) solution, which is available at local pharmacies or supermarkets. Spritz a few drops of the solution into clogged nasal passages and sneeze or gently suction out the loosened secretions using a nasal aspirator. Using a Neti Pot is also a good way to flush out the nose.

Savor a "steam-clean" by using either a facial steamer or vaporizer to loosen nasal and sinus secretions.

5. STAY ACTIVE

Movement mobilizes the immune system. Kids who sit too much – especially indoors – get sick more often. Movement also mellows the mood, as stress depresses the immune system.