

# Infection Prevention in the Home

If you have an infection, may have been exposed to an infection, or are taking care of someone who has an infection, it is important to know how to keep the infection from spreading. Follow your health care provider's instructions and use these guidelines to help stop the spread of infection.

## How infections are spread

In order for an infection to spread, the following must be present:

- A germ. This may be a virus, bacteria, fungus, or parasite.
- A place for the germ to live. This may be:
  - On or in a person, animal, plant, or food.
  - In soil or water.
  - On surfaces, such as a door handle.
- A person or animal who can develop a disease if the germ enters the body (*host*). The host does not have resistance to the germ.
- A way for the germ to enter the host. This may occur by:
  - Direct contact with an infected person or animal. This can happen through shaking hands or hugging. Some germs can also travel through the air and spread to others. This can happen when an infected person coughs or sneezes on or near other people.
  - Indirect contact. This occurs when the germ enters the host through contact with an infected object. Examples include:
    - Eating or drinking food or water that has the germ (is *contaminated*).
    - Touching a contaminated surface with your hands, and then touching your face, eyes, nose, or mouth.

## Supplies needed:

- Soap.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Standard cleaning products.
- Disinfectants, such as bleach.
- Reusable cleaning cloths, sponges, or paper towels.
- Disposable or reusable utility gloves.

## How to prevent infection from spreading

There are several things that you can do to help prevent infection from spreading.

**Take these general actions**



Everyone should take the following actions to prevent the spread of infection:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your face, mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, sleeve, or elbow instead of into your hand or into the air.
  - If you cough or sneeze into a tissue, throw it away immediately and wash your hands.

### Keep your bathroom clean

- Provide soap.
- Change towels and washcloths frequently.
- Change toothbrushes often and store them separately in a clean, dry place.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces, including the toilet, floor, tub, shower, and sink.
- **Do not** share personal items, such as razors, toothbrushes, deodorant, combs, brushes, towels, and washcloths.

### Maintain hygiene in the kitchen



- Wash your hands before and after preparing food and before you eat.
- Clean the inside of your refrigerator each week.
- Keep your refrigerator set at 40°F (4°C) or less, and set your freezer at 0°F (-18°C) or less.
- Keep work surfaces clean. Disinfect them regularly.
- Wash your dishes in hot, soapy water. Air-dry your dishes or use a dishwasher.
- **Do not** share dishes or eating utensils.

### Handle food safely

- Store food carefully.
- Refrigerate leftovers promptly in covered containers.
- Throw out stale or spoiled food.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator or microwave, not at room temperature.
- Serve foods at the proper temperature. **Do not** eat raw meat. Make sure it is cooked to the appropriate temperature. Cook eggs until they are firm.
- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water.

- Use separate cutting boards, plates, and utensils for raw foods and cooked foods.
- Use a clean spoon each time you sample food while cooking.

### Do laundry the right way

- Wear gloves if laundry is visibly soiled.
- **Do not** shake soiled laundry. Doing that may send germs into the air.
- Wash laundry in hot water.
- If you cannot wash the laundry right away, place it in a plastic bag and wash it as soon as possible.

### Be careful around animals and pets

- Wash your hands before and after touching animals.
- If you have a pet, ensure that your pet stays clean. **Do not** let people with weak immune systems touch bird droppings, fish tank water, or a litter box.
  - If you have a pet cage or litter box, be sure to clean it every day.
- If you are sick, stay away from animals and have someone else care for them if possible.

## How to clean and disinfect objects and surfaces

### Precautions

- Some disinfectants work for certain germs and not others. Read the manufacturer's instructions or read online resources to determine if the product you are using will work for the germ you are trying to remove.
- If you choose to use bleach, use it safely. Never mix it with other cleaning products, especially those that contain ammonia. This mixture can create a dangerous gas that may be deadly.
- Keep proper movement of fresh air in your home (*ventilation*).
- Pour used mop water down the utility sink or toilet. **Do not** pour this water down the kitchen sink.

### Objects and surfaces



- If surfaces are visibly soiled, clean them first with soap and water before disinfecting.
- Disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched every day. This may include:
  - Counters.
  - Tables.
  - Doorknobs.
  - Sinks and faucets.
  - Electronics, such as:

- Phones.
- Remote controls.
- Keyboards.
- Computers and tablets.

### Cleaning supplies

Some cleaning supplies can breed germs. Take good care of them to prevent germs from spreading. To do this:

- Soak toilet brushes, mops, and sponges in bleach and water for 5 minutes after each use, or according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Wash reusable cleaning cloths and sanitize sponges after each use.
- Throw away disposable gloves after one use.
- Replace reusable utility gloves if they are cracked or torn or if they start to peel.

## Additional actions if you are sick

### If you live with other people:



- Avoid close contact with those around you. Stay at least 3 ft (1 m) away from others, if possible.
- Use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- If possible, sleep in a separate bedroom or in a separate bed to prevent infecting other household members.
  - **Change bedroom linens each week or whenever they are soiled.**
- Have everyone in the household wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### In general:

- Stay home except to get medical care. Call ahead before visiting your health care provider.
- Ask others to get groceries and household supplies and to refill prescriptions for you.
- Avoid public areas. Try not to take public transportation.
- If you can, wear a mask if you need to go out of the house, or if you are in close contact with someone who is not sick.
- Avoid visitors until you have completely recovered, or until you have no signs and symptoms of infection.
- Avoid preparing food or providing care for others. If you must prepare food or provide care for others, wear a mask and wash your hands before and after doing these things.

## Where to find more information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/index.html)
- World Health Organization (WHO): [www.who.int/infection-prevention/about/en/](http://www.who.int/infection-prevention/about/en/)
- Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology: [professionals.site.apic.org/settings-of-care/non-healthcare-setting/home/](http://professionals.site.apic.org/settings-of-care/non-healthcare-setting/home/)

## Summary

- It is important to know how to keep the infection from spreading.
- Make sure everyone in your household washes their hands often with soap and water.
- Disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched every day.
- If you are sick, stay home except to get medical care.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

Document Released: 03/13/2020 Document Revised: 03/13/2020 Document Reviewed: 03/13/2020  
Elsevier Patient Education © 2020 Elsevier Inc.