

Kids Can Lower Their Flu Risk



The flu is in the news. As the flu spreads, healthcare workers have two simple pieces of advice for kids and others who want to prevent the spread of flu germs.

Wash your hands. Viruses don't pass *through* the skin, but they can live on the hands and enter the body when people touch their mouths, eyes, or noses. That's why hand-washing with soap and water is more effective than anything else in fighting the spread of the flu virus. How long should you wash your hands? Doctors say you should wash for as long as it takes you to say the alphabet from A to Z. That should be long enough to kill most germs.

Cover your coughs and sneezes. Most flu germs are transmitted through the air. The flu virus clings to droplets that come out of your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Those wet droplets are pretty heavy, so they don't travel far; they fall quickly to the ground. You can protect people within a few feet of you from cough or sneeze germs by covering your mouth and nose with a tissue, your hand, or your shirtsleeve.

Doctors say new flu viruses appear almost every year. Flu vaccines can prevent the spread of some flu viruses, but they are not effective in fighting all the new flu viruses that might appear. Making a vaccine to fight new viruses can take up to six months. That's why doctors say people can best fight the spread of flu by washing their hands and covering their coughs.

NEWS WORD BOX

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droplets vaccine

MORE FACTS ABOUT FLU

- Flu viruses and other germs like warm, moist environments. They don't live as long on doorknobs, desks, and other hard surfaces.
- In an average year, about 200,000 U.S. people are hospitalized with the flu.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

Maybe you have heard the expression
"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."
Does that seem true when it comes to fighting the flu?
Explain your thinking.