

## Tips to avoid the flu

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Do you cough without covering your mouth while standing in the lunch line? Or sneeze loudly into the air when squeezed onto the morning bus? Nearly all Americans (96 percent) have seen people do things like this, and a shocking three quarters say they are guilty themselves.

Even with heightened concerns during this year's flu season, Americans admit sleeves are a fine substitute for tissues: one in four wipes his or her nose on them. One in 10 is even more gross: skipping sleeves altogether in favor of hands to wipe his nose and then extending for a handshake or reaching for a door handle.

So, what are we doing about it? In a recent survey by the Water Quality and Health Council, Americans come clean; we're not doing much.

Despite constant warnings from health officials and a recent "Risk Analysis" study showing a 31 percent chance of infection through hand contact with contaminated surfaces, few Americans frequently clean the public surfaces they use.

In fact, as opposed to wiping down the surfaces they come in contact with, a whopping 42 percent of Americans are opting to avoid public spaces. But staying home isn't the answer. Taking control of your environment is.

"Knowing flu viruses can live on inanimate surfaces for hours or even days should motivate people to take personal responsibility to protect themselves," said Dr. Chris Wiant, chair of the Water Quality and Health Council. "This means disinfecting surfaces, when feasible, using disinfecting wipes or chlorine bleach—especially at home and at work—as well as washing your hands and practicing good personal hygiene habits."

"Contacting school administrators, office managers and even health club managers will help you understand their cleaning and disinfecting protocol and how you can better safeguard against the flu," he added.

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To help people prevent the spread of H1N1, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends keeping surfaces clean by wiping them down with a disinfectant according to the directions on the product label.

In addition to cleaning surfaces, the CDC advises:

—Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after use. If someone doesn't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the elbow or shoulder, not into the hands.

—Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

—Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

—If someone is sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from making them sick.

For more information on how to prevent the spread of H1N1 through surface disinfection, visit [www.fluandhealth.com](http://www.fluandhealth.com)