

Steer clear of sneezes and sniffles by staying healthy

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

The cold weather brings with it a season of smiles, the first snowfalls and, unfortunately, cold and flu outbreaks. While everyone else is suffering, there are ways people can make it through the season unscathed.

It is estimated that a billion people across North America will succumb to the cold virus this year, says Medline. Considering there is no cure for cold and flu viruses, prevention remains a person's best option at fending off cold and flu. There are different precautions to take that can help protect people against getting sick or at least reduce the frequency and severity with which cold and flu strikes.

Although there is no magic pill to take that will prevent people from catching a cold or the flu, there are ways to improve the odds.

—Wash hands the right way. Washing hands frequently remains the single-best way to keep viruses and bacteria that can make people sick from infiltrating the body. Washing hands for at least 20 seconds can effectively remove any dirt, grime and invisible invaders.

—Skip antibacterial products. Because colds and the flu are the result of viruses, which are different in behavior and structure from bacteria, they will not be killed off with the use of antibacterial products. What people may succeed in doing is killing off any beneficial bacteria on hands as well as creating resistant bacteria that form with over-use of antibiotics and antibacterial products.

—Get the flu shot. There is no vaccination to prevent the common cold, but there are immunizations that can help reduce the risk of getting the flu or help minimize its severity. Doctors' offices, clinics and even pharmacies all offer annual flu shots.

—Use sanitizer on items around the house. Surfaces that are frequently touched by all members of the household should be wiped down with a disinfectant product. A bleach-and-water solution is an effective sanitizer. Surfaces to sanitize include phones, doorknobs, light switches, remote controls, computer keyboards, faucets, toys and countertops.

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—Avoid sick people. Kids Health.org states that flu viruses and colds can travel up to 12 feet (from a sneeze or cough). Steer clear of anyone exhibiting symptoms, especially someone who is frequently sneezing or coughing. Parents should keep children home from school if they are sick. Do so until symptoms subside so as not to infect others.

—Use a sanitizer product. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advise that when hand-washing is not readily available, a good way to kill germs is to use an alcohol-based sanitizer lotion. While not as effective as washing hands in warm, soapy water, sanitizing products can be used in a pinch while the family is on the go.

—Cough into sleeves. Rather than coughing or sneezing into hands, do so into the crook of the elbow since this area rarely touches anything else.

—Skip the buffet lunch. Buffet-style offerings are convenient and offer variety, but they are also a breeding ground for illnesses. These foods may have been sneezed or coughed on. Also, the serving spoons have been touched by dozens of people.

There are many different ways to avoid getting a cold or the flu this season. Diligence is one of the keys to staying germ-free.

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