

Respiratory Etiquette is Key to Cold, Flu Prevention

January is often the peak time for the flu season in Texas, and it's not too late to get a flu shot and take other common sense steps to protect yourself from illness.

Flu is spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, releasing the contagious virus into the air. People with flu can transmit the virus to others from one day before getting sick to up to seven days after showing symptoms of the flu.

"Respiratory etiquette" is the newest phrase in healthcare circles, and refers to taking common-sense steps to prevent the spread of germs from person to person.

Washing your hands thoroughly and often is the most important way you can prevent catching and spreading germs to others and prevent many communicable diseases. Use warm water and soap and scrub your hands for about 20 seconds. Dry your hands with a clean, disposable towel. Use an alcohol-based hand cleaner when soap and water are not available. In addition, the [Texas Department of State Health Services](#) recommends these precautions to reduce your risk of catching or spreading flu germs:

- Wash your hands before eating, or touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Wash your hands after touching anyone who is sneezing, coughing or has a runny nose. This is true especially if you are taking care of someone who is sick.
- Do not share towels, lipstick, toys, cigarettes, food, eating utensils, drinking glasses or anything that might be contaminated with respiratory germs.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and avoid close, crowded spaces when possible.
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue every time you sneeze, blow your nose, or cough. Do not use handkerchiefs.
- Put used tissues in the nearest trashcan.
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Stay home if you have a cough and fever. Keep away from family members who are very young, very old, or have a serious disease or weak immune system.
- Because cold viruses can survive for hours outside the body, cleaning surfaces with a virus-killing disinfectant (such as a one part bleach to nine parts water mixture) can help prevent the spread of common germs.