

Avoiding Infections When Returning to School

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DENVER — Back-to-school is widely recognized in the medical community as a time when many children pick up viral and other infections from their classmates. With swine flu circulating throughout the United States, it is especially important to follow good hygiene practices to reduce the chances of catching the swine flu, seasonal flu or other infections. National Jewish Health Assistant Professor of Pediatrics Kirstin Carel, MD, offers the following tips to help protect your children and yourself from the flu.

Wash your hands often. Hands are the biggest culprits in disease transmission. One of the most common ways people catch colds and the flu is by touching a contaminated surface, then rubbing their noses or their eyes. Wash your hands often, especially:

- before, during, and after you prepare food
- before you eat, and after you use the bathroom
- after handling animals or animal waste
- when your hands are dirty, and
- more frequently when someone in your home is sick,

Avoid unnecessary contact with a lot of people. It isn't always easy to tell when people are sick, and some people are contagious even before they have symptoms, so avoid large crowds of people if you can.

Avoid close contact with people when you are sick. It isn't really possible to completely avoid people who are sick. But you can help fight the problem if you avoid exposing other people to your germs when you or your kids are sick. So don't go to school, daycare, work, etc., if you are sick.

Teach your children 'cough etiquette'. Teach children to turn their heads and cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue or the inside of their elbow if they don't have a tissue, instead of simply coughing or sneezing onto their hands, which will then spread their germs onto everything they touch.

Clean, clean, clean. Routinely clean, with soap and water, and disinfect surfaces, toys, and objects that younger children may put in their mouths. It may also help to wipe surfaces with paper towels that can be thrown away or cloth towels that can be washed afterwards.

Water fountains can be the enemy. Take a reusable water bottle to school, instead of using the school water fountain, which may become contaminated with germs, especially during cold and flu season.

National Jewish Health is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 124 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit the [media resources page](#).

Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

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