

# Staying healthy

## *Reducing your risk of catching and spreading infections*



### What are germs?

The word *germ* is a general term for many types of tiny organisms. Bacteria and viruses are two types of germs.

**Bacteria** are virtually everywhere in our environment. Of the billions of types of bacteria, only 50 are known to cause infection.

**Viruses** cause far more infection than bacteria and spread far more easily. If more than one person in your family has an illness, chances are it's a viral infection. Cold and flu viruses invade our cells and rapidly grow in number, causing symptoms like runny nose, cough, aches, and sore throats.

### How are germs spread?

Germs can live for 24 to 48 hours on hard surfaces like desks, tables and doorknobs. Germs can live for 8 to 12 hours on cloth, paper and tissue, and for five minutes on your hands.

Most people get sick when they touch something that is contaminated with germs and then touch

their eyes, nose or mouth. The easiest way to reduce your chances of getting sick is to clean your hands often.

### Six steps to stopping the spread of germs

#### 1. Clean your hands

- Wash your hands often using liquid soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Remember to wash your hands:
  - Before and after using the washroom
  - Before and after handling food
  - After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
  - After handling something that is dirty
  - After shaking hands
  - Before touching your face

#### 2. Practice proper cough etiquette

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue out and wash your hands.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands!
- After coughing or sneezing always clean your hands with liquid soap & water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### Did you know?...

Almost all of the infections you have had, you have given yourself by your own hands.

### 3. Stay home when you feel sick

- Adults and children should stay home until they no longer have a fever and are feeling better for one full day.

### 4. Get immunized

- For immunization clinic times and locations, contact Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services at **519 539-9800** or toll-free at **1 800 755-0394**.

### 5. Clean frequently touched items and surfaces

- Provide extra cleaning in frequently touched areas of the house, such as tabletops, keyboards, door knobs, counter tops, remote controls, telephones and light switches.
- Dishwashing and laundry can be done as normal.

### 5. Don't share personal items

- Do not share objects that have been in other people's mouths. For example, toothbrushes, drinks, water bottles, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, lip products and mouthpieces of musical instruments.

### More information

- Contact Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services at 519 539-9800 or toll-free at 1 800 755-0394
- Visit the Oxford County website at [www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth](http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth)

*Adapted from Elgin-St. Thomas Public Health, 2009*

Is it a COLD or the FLU?				
SYMPTOM	COLD		INFLUENZA (FLU)	
FEVER	✘	Rare	✓	Usually. High fever (39°-40°C) with sudden onset, lasts 3-4 days
HEADACHE	✘	Rare	✓	Usual, can be sudden
GENERAL ACHES & PAINS	○	Generally mild	✓	Usual, often severe
FATIGUE (TIREDNESS)	○	Generally mild	✓	Usual, severe, may last 2-3 weeks
RUNNY, STUFFY NOSE	✓	Common	✓	Common
SNEEZING	✓	Common	○	Sometimes
SORE THROAT	✓	Common	✓	Common
NAUSEA & VOMITING	✘	None	✘	Uncommon but can occur, especially in children
DIARRHEA	✘	None	✘	Uncommon but can occur, especially in children
CHEST DISCOMFORT, COUGH	○	Sometimes, mild	✓	Usual, can be severe to moderate. Cough may last for weeks
COMPLICATIONS	✓	Can lead to sinus congestion or earache	✓	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure; worsen a chronic condition; or be life-threatening