

# Germs, Germs Everywhere

Germs are tiny organisms that can cause disease. They are everywhere, and they are so tiny that you need a microscope to see them. Some germs can live two hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. What are the main sources of germs in the home? People, pets, and food.

Most germs we come in contact with are harmless. Some even help us stay healthy. However, there are some germs that can make us sick. The toxins germs produce can cause symptoms of common infections like fevers, rashes, coughing, vomiting, and diarrhea. Germs are mainly spread through the air (from a sneeze or cough) but can also spread through sweat, saliva, and blood.



## Durham Regional Hospital

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For more than 30 years, Durham Regional Hospital has been serving the health care needs of Durham, Orange, Person, Granville, and surrounding counties. Our mission is to care for our patients, nurturing the sick and strengthening the well, and to improve the health of the communities we serve. As part of Duke Medicine, Durham Regional Hospital is dedicated to providing exceptional medical care with the personal touch and convenience only a community hospital can offer.

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# Germs

## Protect yourself

What can you do to help stop the spread of germs? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following to help protect against germs:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough. Sneeze or cough into a tissue and then throw it away. If you don't have a tissue, sneezing or coughing in to the bend of your elbow or shoulder may help reduce the risk of colds and flu.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. Be sure to rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces. Wash for 15 to 20 seconds—that's about the same time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice! Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet. Soap and water not available? Alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. If using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Most often, germs are spread when people touch things with germs and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick, get plenty of rest, and check with your doctor when needed. Keeping your distance from others may protect them from getting sick too!
- Practice other good health habits like getting plenty of sleep and physical activity. That can help you stay healthy throughout the year. Eating healthy foods and drinking water also helps. In fact, eating a balanced diet provides your immune system with the fuel it needs to fight infections.

## Protect your kids

Although there is no way to keep a child away from germs, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends three additional tips for parents/caregivers:

- Avoid sharing eating utensils, drinking cups, toothbrushes, washcloths, and towels with anyone.
- Wash dishes and utensils in hot, soapy water.
- Do not smoke around children.

## Hand washing resources

To raise awareness about the benefits of hand washing, improve the health of children, and reduce school sick days, NSF International developed The Scrub Club™.

The Scrub Club™, designed for children three to eight years of age, is a fun, interactive, and educational Web site ([scrubclub.org](http://scrubclub.org)) that teaches children the proper way to wash their hands. The site consists of interactive games, educational music, downloadable activities for kids, educational materials for teachers, and program information for parents.

NSF International—The Public Health and Safety Company, a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization—is the world leader in standards development, product certification, education, and risk management for public health and safety.

The CDC also provides a hand washing resource for kids called Healthy Schools, Healthy People: It's a SNAP (School Network for Absenteeism Prevention). SNAP ([itsasnap.org](http://itsasnap.org)) is a grassroots, education-based effort to improve health by making hand cleaning an integral part of the school day. It is designed to get the entire school talking about clean hands by providing tools for incorporating hand hygiene into multiple subject areas and activities.

