

5 Simple Ways to Dodge the Flu

The holidays are over and everyone is heading back to work and school. Unfortunately, the flu season kicked into high gear during the holidays, and many people will be bringing flu viruses with them to spread around your office, your kids' school and other places you can't avoid.

How can you dodge the flu? While you can't guarantee you won't get sick, you can put the odds of a healthy winter on your side by following five simple steps.

1. Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently. Hand washing is a do-it-yourself vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Your hands, and especially your fingers, are magnets for bacteria and viruses. They easily enter your body when you touch your eyes, nose or mouth. A good hand-washing using five steps—wet, lather, scrub, rinse and dry—can send them down the drain.

2. Use hand sanitizers. When good old soap and water aren't available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, advises the CDC. They're not as effective as a good hand scrubbing and some are basically ineffective, but if you use a lot of the product, it's better than doing nothing at all.

3. Clean vigilantly. Flu viruses cling to surfaces such as computer keyboards, desk tops and door handles, says an article published on . The CDC says viruses don't usually live long on surfaces, probably no longer than eight hours, so the most effective strategy might be a wipe-down with disinfectant wipes during lunch to help keep germs from spreading.

4. Get the flu shot. Even though the flu vaccine for this year isn't a good match for the most common strain of flu that's circulating, the CDC continues to advise people to get the

shot, saying it will still offer some protection.

In an advisory, the CDC said that the virus had mutated since the vaccine was formulated and that more than half of the virus samples they collected were different from the strains included in the vaccine. The strain that's most common this year is linked to higher rates of hospitalizations and deaths, and even some protection beats none at all, some experts believe.

5. Stay at arm's length. It's elementary, but keep your distance from people who are sick. Flu germs spread on the air—from sneezes and coughs—but keeping a few feet away can keep you away from the danger zone, according to .

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