

## How to reduce the spread of infectious diseases at home



Families with small children get sick a lot. The bodies of young children can't fight germs as well as adult bodies can. Young children also haven't learned about hand washing and other practices that help prevent infectious diseases. Some infectious diseases, like the common cold, are hard to avoid. Young children get 8 to 10 colds a year. This is normal.

### You can reduce the spread of some infectious diseases in your family by taking these steps:

- 1 **Wash your hands!** This is the most important thing you can do. It is especially important to wash your hands:
  - ◆ after you use the bathroom. Children often need help remembering this and they need help doing it properly.
  - ◆ before and after you cook your food (especially raw meat and poultry) and before you eat.
  - ◆ after you clean the house.
  - ◆ after you touch animals, including family pets, or their food, leashes or waste.
  - ◆ before and after you visit or take care of any sick friends or relatives.
  - ◆ after you blow your nose, or sneeze or cough into your hands (or you help a child do this).
  - ◆ after changing a diaper.
  - ◆ after you work or play outside.
  - ◆ when they look dirty.



- 2 **Sneeze or cough into a tissue or into your sleeve, not your hand.** When you sneeze in your hand and then touch a surface, like a door knob, you leave your germs there for someone else to pick up. When they touch their eyes or nose with their hand, they can get infected by the germs on their fingers.

- 3 **Clean surfaces that people touch a lot** with a high quality microfiber cloth and a cleaner that is listed here <http://www.informedgreensolutions.org/?q=publications/green-cleaning-toolkit>. These are cleaners that are safer. Products certified by the EPA's Design for the Environment and Green Seal can be found in grocery stores. Look for their logo on the container label. In hospitals microfiber has been shown to work almost as well as a disinfectant when used with a cleaning product. Microfiber absorbs germs and dirt better than cotton.



- 4 **Buy color-coded microfiber cloths to clean your house.** Use one color for the bathroom and another for the kitchen. This way you won't transfer germs from one area to another. Start cleaning higher areas like sinks then lower areas like toilets. Follow manufacturer's instructions for laundering microfiber. This will keep microfiber working well.
- 5 **Use microfiber and an all-purpose cleaner instead of disinfectants.** Many disinfectants contain chemicals that are harmful to your family's health and to the environment. Using high quality microfiber and a third-party certified household cleaner reduces germs on surfaces very effectively and is much safer. If you have an infectious disease going through your house and you still want to disinfect, use a safer disinfectant. A list of safer products can be found at <http://www.informedgreensolutions.org/?q=publications/green-cleaning-toolkit>.

- 6 Only disinfect the surfaces that get touched a lot, like door knobs, stair railings and bathroom**



faucets and toilet levers. Make sure you clean the surfaces first. Dirt makes it hard for disinfectants to kill germs. Use disinfectants only when and where you need to. Make sure you keep the disinfectant visibly wet on the surface for the amount of time (“dwell time”) stated on the label instructions or it won’t kill germs. If you don’t allow the disinfectant to dwell for the full time, you can allow resistant germs to remain and grow. This is how “superbugs” develop.

- 7 Use a dishwasher for washable children’s toys with hard surfaces.**



- 8 Remember that keyboards may be touched by many people and are hard to clean and disinfect. Try using a flexible silicone cover on your family computer keyboard. It is easier to clean. It also protects the keyboard from accidental spills. Silicone keyboard covers may be molded to fit specific keyboards or may be simple, thin covers intended for use on any keyboard.**

- 9 Avoid using sponges in your kitchen. Use microfiber instead. Sponges are perfect breeding grounds for germs. They are dirty and wet, providing food and drink for germs to grow. If you want to use a sponge, microwave it for two minutes every day (make sure your sponge is wet and doesn’t contain any metal), or put it in the dishwasher every time you run it.**

#### RESOURCES

Third-party organizations that certify cleaning products which are safer for people and the environment:

EcoLogo <http://www.ecologo.org/en/>

The United States Environmental Protection Agency’s Design for the Environment <http://www.epa.gov/dfe/>

Green Seal <http://www.greenseal.org/>

The Environmental Protection Agency’s Disinfectant Pilot Program lists safer disinfectants:

<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/regulating/labels/design-dfe-pilot.html#means>

Other groups that provide guidance on safer cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting products:

The Environmental Working Group’s Guide to Healthy Cleaning <http://www.ewg.org/guides/cleaners>

Women’s Voices for the Earth: Safe Cleaning Products and Do-It-Yourself Recipes

<http://www.womensvoices.org/campaigns/safe-cleaning-products/>

How to Clean a Silicone Keyboard Cover | eHow.com

[http://www.ehow.com/how\\_6775712\\_clean-silicone-keyboard-cover.html#ixzz2ljQ7aZ5y](http://www.ehow.com/how_6775712_clean-silicone-keyboard-cover.html#ixzz2ljQ7aZ5y)

San Francisco Approved List: Products that meet San Francisco’s Health and Environmental Requirements

<http://www.sfapproved.org/>