

Germs live everywhere – in the air, on food, plants and animals, in soil and water, and just about every surface, including your body.

Your immune system will usually protect you from infectious agents. However, some germs are constantly mutating to breach your immune systems' defenses. That's why the influenza vaccine has to change every year – to try and beat the bug that has mutated from years before.

What's the best way to stay disease free? Prevent infections.

You can prevent infections through simple processes, including:

### HAND WASHING

Wash your hands regularly. This is the easiest and most effective way to protect yourself from germs and most infections.

Wash your hands thoroughly before preparing or eating food, after coughing or sneezing, and after using the toilet. Also wash after touching something that could be contaminated, before inserting contact lenses, and more often when someone around you is sick.

When washing, wet your hands and apply liquid, bar or powder soap.

- Rub hands together vigorously to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue for 20 seconds! Most soaps don't directly kill germs – but washing for at least 20 seconds will dislodge the dirt and germs and flush them down the sink.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- If possible, dry your hands on paper towel and not with an air dryer (studies have shown that there are more germs left around an air dryer than a paper towel holder). Use the paper towel to shut off the faucet.



When soap and water aren't available, alcohol-based hand-sanitizing gels can offer protection (but remember to wash with soap and water as soon as possible).

### VACCINES

Vaccination is your best line of defense for certain diseases. Many vaccines are given in childhood and provide life-long protection, but some require routine vaccination to keep up with the mutating germs, such as the vaccine for influenza. Tetanus is another disease that requires a vaccine every ten years.



### MEDICINES

Some medicines offer short-term protection from particular germs. For instance, taking an anti-parasitic medication may prevent you from contracting malaria if you travel to a high-risk area.

### REGULARLY CLEAN SURFACES

Cell phones, keyboard trays, iPads and counter tops are full of germs. Clean them often! You should contact your I/T support if the devices are owned by your organization as cleaning them the wrong way can render them useless.

Ultraviolet-C light has been used to kill germs on surfaces. Disinfecting wipes can clean the surfaces as well, but need to be used carefully to avoid causing damage to electronics.

