



INFECTION PREVENTION & YOU

DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE

To help prevent infections, keep your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth. Why? Touching the mucous membranes on your face with your dirty hands allows germs that cause respiratory infections to enter the body.

Why is not touching your face so important?

It is estimated that people touch their faces about 23 times per hour! Respiratory infections can be caused by many different bacteria, viruses, and other disease-causing germs. When you touch your face with dirty, unwashed hands, germs can take up residence in your mucous membranes which can lead to an infection.

How are respiratory infections spread?

Respiratory infections, like pneumonia or the flu, can spread through droplets in the air when a sick person coughs, sneezes, or talks near you. Respiratory infections can also spread by direct contact with bacteria, viruses, and other disease-causing germs. When we touch people who are sick, or touch dirty surfaces, we contaminate our hands with germs. We can then infect ourselves with those germs by touching our face.

How can I protect myself from respiratory infections?

There are several ways that you can protect yourself from getting a respiratory infection:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Never touch your face with dirty hands.
- Wash your hands frequently. Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to clean your hands if soap and water are not available.
- Get a flu shot every year. Encourage your family and friends to get a flu shot too!
- Ask your healthcare provider if the pneumonia vaccine is right for you.
- Avoid being close to people who are coughing and sneezing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CDC—When and how to wash your hands: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

Kwok, YLA., Galton, J., and McLaws, ML. Face touching: A frequent habit that has implications for hand hygiene. *Am J Infect Control*. 2015;43(2):112-114. Available at: [https://www.ajicjournal.org/article/S0196-6553\(14\)01281-4/fulltext](https://www.ajicjournal.org/article/S0196-6553(14)01281-4/fulltext).