

# WHAT TO EXPECT<sup>®</sup> GUIDE TO A HEALTHY HOME

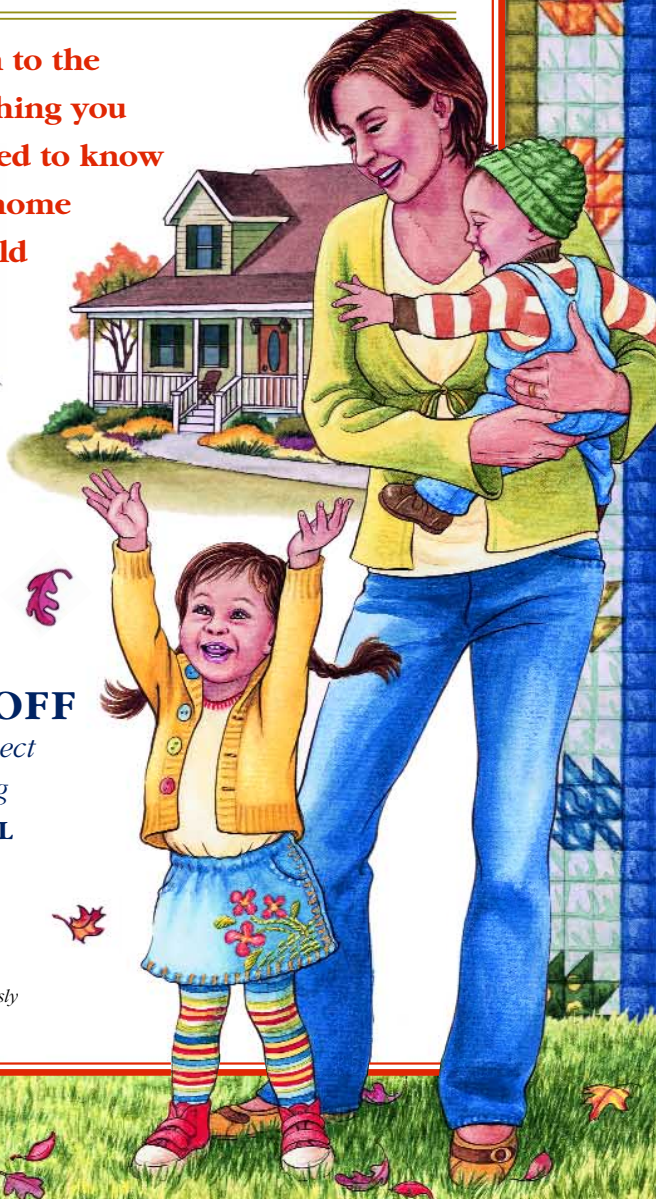
From the playroom to the  
playground, everything you  
and your family need to know  
to help keep your home  
healthier during cold  
and flu season and  
all year round

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**H**ere's some good news that might surprise you: Your house is probably a lot cleaner than you think (and than your mother always seems to be telling you). Yes, your home — the one with the assortment of sneakers and socks strewn in the hallway, with the hundreds of toys covering the living room rug (there's a rug under there?), and with the piles of clothes that can't ever seem to make their way into the laundry basket — isn't such a dirty place after all. What's more (and more good news), it's also a lot healthier than you might imagine. Thanks to improved sanitation (that indoor toilet and running water you take for granted, that refrigerator you never give a second thought to), increased awareness about personal hygiene (think hand washing) and food safety (think sell-by dates), and advances

in preventative medicine (notably those yearly checkups and up-to-date immunizations), the likelihood that you — or one of your family members — will get seriously sick from the mess you call home (or venturing outside the home — to school, to the playground, or to the supermarket) is pretty slim.

So now that you've gotten the good news memo, what exactly does it mean for you? It means that when it comes to cleaning your home or protecting your kids from illnesses, there's no need to stress — or to go overboard. A few preventative measures and a dose of common sense is all it takes to help keep your home and family healthier. It's easier than you think (and a lot easier than your mother would like you to believe) — and it's all here in this guide.



# Keeping Your House Healthy

## A CLEAN AND HEALTHY HOME

**Y**ou've overheard parents talking about them at the playground and you've seen the reports about them on the news. They've even made headlines. To hear the media (and the other moms, not to mention your mother-in-law) tell it, you'd think that germs (aka viruses, bacteria, and molds) are hanging out in every corner of your house, ready to infect anyone who comes within spitting distance of them.

But before you start freaking out at the thought of microscopic menaces floating around your house, consider this first: You can't escape germs completely—and what's more, a little exposure to some germs might help build up a healthy immune system, according to some researchers.

So does that mean you can throw caution (and cleansers) to the wind, and let germs have free run of your home and family? Not at all. Everyone agrees that some germs are best avoided (think: *E. coli*, a bacteria that can cause severe diarrhea) and some allergens have no place in your home (such as those dust bunnies breeding on those stuffed bunnies), which means it's smart to limit the allergens and germs that shack up with you and your loved ones, without trying to aim for a lab-sterile environment around

the house. Here are some helpful tips on keeping your house healthier:

### THE BEDROOM

Between plush pillows, fluffy blankets, and flowing drapery, the bedroom isn't only a cozy haven for its human occupants, it's also a great place for germs and allergens to make themselves at home.

**The bed.** Since germs and allergens love to hang out in bed (and who can blame them?), sheets should be changed—and washed in warm or hot water in the washing machine. You'll need to change them more often when someone is sick (and especially if that someone is throwing up), and you might consider throwing in some disinfecting bleach<sup>1</sup> for extra germ removal (if your sheets are white). Baby sheets should also hit the hot water more often, since the littlest sleepers tend to be the messiest ones (think leaky diapers of all varieties).

One other note about the bed: Even if Fluffy or Fido is your child's best friend, letting pets and children sleep together might not be such a good idea. Furry coats are magnets for germs and allergens, and sharing a bed will also mean sharing more germs.

### QUICK TIP

**H**ave a particularly prolific spitter? Place a spit-up pad under your baby's head and tie it to the crib slats. That way you'll only have to change the pad three times a day—instead of the sheets.

**The changing table.** By the time your baby reaches his or her first birthday, you'll have changed nearly 2,500 diapers. Toss in the year or two's worth you'll change before your tot is a potty pro, and you've got yourself a staggering number of dirty diapers. And germs.

To keep your baby's bottom clean and baby's environment healthier:

- ◆ Wash your hands before and after changing a diaper.
- ◆ Cover the changing pad with washable covers that can be easily thrown into the hot water wash every few days (or more, if necessary).
- ◆ Clean the changing table every few days with a mild detergent and water. For those times when soap and water won't cut it (your little one decides to mark his territory with a fountain of pee or decorate it with the most explosive poop on record), step up to disinfecting by wiping surfaces of the changing table with a disinfecting wipe. This is particularly important if your baby is vomiting or has diarrhea.

### THE BATHROOM

Your visit to the bathroom each day might be a quick in and out, but bacteria like to hang around long after the toilet flushes. Though there are actually more germs in the kitchen (surprise!), plenty call the bathroom home. And it's no wonder. Warm and wet, the bath-

room environment is extremely hospitable to mold, mildew, and bacteria.

**The surfaces.** Pull the welcome mat out from under those bathroom germs by wiping down sinks, countertops, toilet seats (especially if your little boy hasn't quite become the master of his aim yet), and tub and shower walls with disinfecting cleansers or wipes. Don't forget to wipe down other hot spots, too — cabinet pulls, faucets handles, and door knobs—where more than a fair share of germs lurk (especially if some family members forget to wash up after going to the potty).

**The toothbrushes.** They're great for cleaning bacteria off teeth, but they're also pretty good at spreading them around the family. To avoid germ swapping, make sure everyone has his or her own toothbrush and that no one shares (color-code them so there's no confusion). Store the toothbrushes at least an inch apart to ensure bristles don't touch and germs don't get passed from one to the other. And replace toothbrushes regularly — especially after an illness (germs can stick around even after you've recovered). Take these simple precautions, and there's no need to invest in one of those pricey toothbrush sterilizers.

### QUICK TIP

**S**till using a communal cup for rinsing? Switch to small paper cups that can be tossed after use. If you'd rather use non-disposable cups, give each family member his or her own cup to use (and to wash often with soapy water after using).

**The towels.** Each time you dry your face on a towel, you leave behind germs in a damp environment that encourages

## US AGAINST THE ALLERGENS

**T**he twin threat of pollen and pollution may keep the allergy-prone indoors, but for many the real trouble begins inside the house. Pet dander, dust mites, mold, and other indoor allergens and irritants are nothing to sneeze at, especially if there is a history of asthma or allergies in your family. Take these steps to reduce your family's exposure to indoor allergens:

**Dust mites.** Though they set up house in fabrics and carpets all around your home, dust mites love the bedroom best, where mattresses, bedding, and pillows serve as veritable condos for these microscopic pests. Though dust mites are no problem for most people, they can spell misery for those with a hypersensitivity to them or the droppings they leave behind. To limit exposure:

- ◆ Dust often with a damp cloth or spray.
- ◆ Vacuum weekly, and consider investing in a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate arresting) filter, which traps dust mites and other allergens.
- ◆ Wash bedding once a week in hot water and wash or have cleaned any drapery once a month.
- ◆ Remove those piles of stuffed animals that are never played with anyway (they're dust mite magnets) and wash your child's favorites weekly. Or put this interesting dust mite factoid to work: Since cold air makes dust mites bite the dust, you can stick stuffed animals in the freezer overnight (don't forget to defrost that teddy before returning it to your child).
- ◆ Install filters on furnace and air-conditioner vents and replace them annually.

**Pet dander.** Flying fur can definitely bring on the sneezes and wheezes in some kids susceptible to allergies (though interestingly, a growing body of evidence suggests that having pets in the home during

the first year of baby's life may actually protect children from pet allergies — making them a possible front line of defense in allergy prevention). If your little one shows the signs of a pet allergy, try to keep your child and Fido in different rooms (and definitely out of the same bed). In severe cases, the only solution may be to find the pet another home.

**Mold.** Mold, another source of indoor air allergens, can make some people miserable — and not just from looking at it. To control mold growth in your home, provide adequate ventilation by venting steam from the kitchen, laundry, and bath and keep the humidity level in the house low (use a dehumidifier if your house is particularly damp). Areas where mold will multiply (garbage cans, refrigerators, shower curtains, bathroom tiles) should be cleaned with a bleach solution or other anti-mold agent.

**Other allergens.** Keep food and garbage under wraps — not because they themselves are allergens, but because they can attract two sources of allergens (not to mention ickiness): mice and cockroaches (especially cockroach droppings). Studies show that these critters produce several allergens associated with the development of asthma.

**Irritants.** Other potential allergenic irritants can be found all over the house. To protect your susceptible children, remove wool blankets, down or feather pillows, perfumes, scented soaps (use hypoallergenic ones), and any tobacco smoke from their environment.



their multiplication. To make sure the next family member using the bathroom doesn't pick up those germs, assign everyone his or her own towels, and wash them all regularly in hot soapy water. One other towel tip: make sure they're hung up to dry (instead of left crumpled on the floor wet, where the germs will multiply faster than you can yell "Don't forget to hang up your towel, Max").

### DID YOU KNOW?

**D**id you know that most people touch 300 surfaces every 30 minutes?

**The toilet.** It's not a pleasant image, but consider this: water vapor (plus the toilet's contents — yes... anything in there) erupts from the toilet like a mini bacteria volcano every time you flush, landing on whatever is nearby (including that toothbrush you left on the sink). Closing the lid before you flush will prevent you from brushing your teeth with toilet water.

Wiping the toilet seat (don't forget to lift the seat too and wipe underneath) with a disinfecting wipe every few days (or more if someone in your family has bad aim) will help to keep the bathroom clean — and the bacteria count down.

**The bathtub.** Your children aren't the only ones playing with the bath toys. Bacteria and germs are having a party with them, too — a party that keeps getting bigger and bigger as the guests multiply. To keep those bugs from breeding on tub toys, let them dry in a net or basket after the bath. Toys that trap water (that rubber ducky comes to mind) need to be cleaned regularly with a diluted bleach solution, then rinsed well and left to dry.

**The shower.** Crack open the window or turn on the exhaust fan each time you take a shower or a bath. Mold and mildew can sprout practically overnight if the environment in the bathroom is just right (warm and damp). And mold isn't only unpleasant to look at; it's a source of indoor allergens as well. (See box facing page.)

## THE PLAYROOM

As tight-fisted as they might be with their toys, kids are always generous when it comes to sharing germs, which get passed around a playroom faster than a racecar at the Indy 500. The typical playroom, in fact, is like an incubating petri dish of bacteria and other

### WHEN TOYS (AND MORE) GO DROP

**W**hat has your baby picked up and eaten from the floor lately? A handful of dropped Cheerios? A lost pacifier? A dead bug? (Are you grossed out yet?) Though you shouldn't encourage your little one to use the floor as his or her personal buffet table, there's no reason to take drastic measures to try to prevent those inevitable hand-to-mouth germ transfers (unless of course it's a choking hazard.) Sure you'll need to keep the floor clean (so don't pack away that mop just yet), but remember that the germs you're concerned about are ones that he or she's already been exposed to, and ones that are not usually harmful. Just make sure that he or she is not picking up (and munching on) damp objects left on the floor — like that day-old pretzel sucked on for hours and then tossed in the toy chest — because bacteria multiplies rapidly on wet surfaces. Also unsuitable for consumption are objects picked up from the ground outside, where less benign germs (like those from dog poop, for instance) make their unwholesome home.

germs. You can find them (if you had a microscope) on stuffed animals and Lego pieces, Barbie shoes and Monopoly hotels, and every toy and game in between (and that's before your daughter's friend with the runny nose rubs her snotty fingers all over them). So that you don't welcome uninvited guests (in the form of germs) into your child's playroom, keep these important tips in mind:

**Stop at the sink before reaching for the toys.** There's no better way to help stop the spread of germs and illness than by washing hands. So before your child and friend head to the playroom, have them make a pit stop at the bathroom for a thorough hand washing (with soap, please!).

**Wipe germs off playroom surfaces.** Make disinfecting wipes your new friend in the playroom (but you don't have to go overboard). Use them to clean germ hotspots such as walls,

shelves, toy chests, drawer handles, closet knobs — almost anywhere little hands touch (which is almost anywhere that's within their reach).

**Keep the toys clean.** Ever watch children at play? First they touch their noses (and smear a little mucus), then they touch a toy, then their hands (and possibly the toy) go into their mouths, then it's back to that toy again. It's no wonder their playthings can host a host of germs — and it may be enough to make kids sick, literally. But you can help stop the spread of viruses and other illnesses by keeping the toys clean. One-piece plastic toys (Lego, for instance) can be washed in the dishwasher (smaller ones can be washed in a fine mesh bag) or the sink in soapy water. Stuffed animals should be thrown into the laundry to help get rid of germs, as well as dust mites and other allergens. If a toy isn't machine-washable, put it in a plastic bag in the freezer overnight.

### OKAY TO SHARE ... DON'T GO THERE

Kids, being kids, love to share everything with their friends — secrets, juice boxes, snot, sometimes even toys. Yes, germs do get around when you get

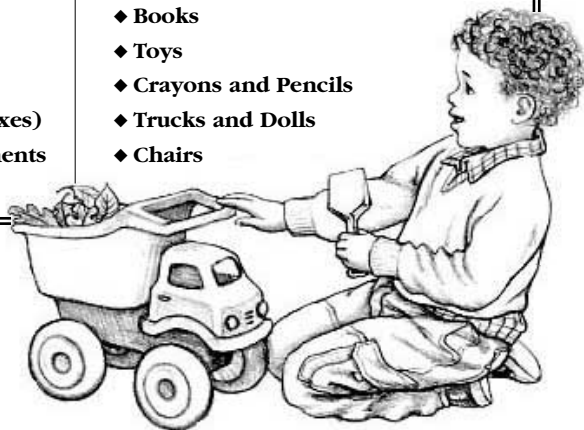
#### DON'T GO THERE

- ◆ Comb and Brush
- ◆ Hat
- ◆ Toothbrush
- ◆ Cups and Forks (and juice boxes)
- ◆ Whistle and other air instruments
- ◆ Tissues

two (or more) children together. Which is why it's important that you teach them what's okay to share with their friends, and what's not.

#### OKAY TO SHARE

- ◆ Books
- ◆ Toys
- ◆ Crayons and Pencils
- ◆ Trucks and Dolls
- ◆ Chairs



## KEEPING YOUR FAMILY'S FOOD SAFE

With little kids underfoot, you probably don't need to think twice about childproofing the kitchen. After all, protecting curious little fingers from hot stovetops and sharp knives is a no-brainer. But have you given any thought to protecting your little ones from another danger in the kitchen: food-borne bacteria?

There are more than 75 million cases of food-borne illnesses in this country each year, and luckily, most result in only a day or two of mild symptoms. But the same bacteria that gives you a case of the queasies and the runs can wreak a lot more havoc in young children who don't have as strong an immune system yet (as well as the elderly and those with weakened immune systems), forcing them to fight off a much more serious illness. Which means being vigilant when preparing food for your family is a priority you should put high on your to-do list. Here are some ways to keep the food you feed your family safe and healthy.

### KEEP YOUR KITCHEN SAFE

Before you prepare any meal or snack in your kitchen (even that quick peanut butter and jelly sandwich), make sure you follow these basic healthy kitchen tips:

**Wash up.** You've heard it a thousand times since childhood, but Mom (and the Health Department) does know best. Washing your hands in hot soapy water before preparing food is your best line of defense against the spread of bacteria in the kitchen. Break out the soap and water, too, after you've

handled raw meat, poultry, fish, or eggs — all of which can harbor dangerous bacteria.

**Throw the towel in.** The washing machine, that is. Kitchen rags, sponges, and towels provide a perfect breeding ground for bacteria, which thrive in moist environments. To avoid drying your hands, wiping your counter, and cleaning your dishes with a veritable petri dish of microorganisms, wash rags and towels often in hot soapy water or in the washing machine (with a little bleach if possible). Replace sponges at least once a month and

### MESSAGE ABOUT THE BOTTLE

Here's a message about your baby's bottle that you might not have known: baby bottles and nipples don't need to be sterilized with special equipment between feedings. Dishwashers (or sink washing with detergent and hot water — plus a bottle brush if necessary) can get them clean enough. Which means there's one less step you'll need to take when it comes to bottle-feeding baby (hurray!).

Still, that doesn't mean that you don't have to give germs a second thought when it comes to your baby's bottle. If there's leftover formula or breastmilk in the bottle at the end of a feeding, toss it instead of putting it into the fridge to be used later. Yes, it may seem like a waste — and yes, formula is expensive and breastmilk precious — but a used bottle (one that has your baby's saliva in the mix now) is a breeding ground for bacteria. A better bet: fill the bottle up with just the right amount that baby needs — and add more if he or she is especially hungry.



wash them thoroughly with soap between uses (you can put them nightly in the dishwasher). Or pop them in the microwave for 30 seconds every night to zap away germs lurking inside the crevices. To avoid spreading germs around your kitchen, use paper towels or disinfecting wipes for kitchen cleanup (and throw even the toughest pickers-uppers away when you're done with each cleanup, rather than saving them for the next spill).

**Mind your surfaces.** Bacteria are faster breeders than rabbits, especially when left to their own devices on kitchen surfaces. To thwart their reproductive efforts, be sure you use soapy water or disinfectant cleaners often. Ditto for all kitchen surfaces — like appliance handles, trash cans, cabinet knobs, even the telephone (you know, the one you used to call Mom with a recipe question while your hands were still full of raw chopped meat). A disinfecting wipe can make that wiping job even easier.

**Stay on the cutting edge.** Keep separate cutting boards for different foods — one for produce, another one for meat, poultry, and fish — and remember to wash them in the dishwasher after each use (or if they're too large to fit, with hot, soapy water). When boards get scarred from too much use, toss them (bacteria like to hide — and multiply — in pitted surfaces).

**Keep utensils separate.** One knife that gets around — from the raw chicken breasts to the cheese to the tomatoes — can spread a whole lot of bacteria around your kitchen. If you're using one knife for several food prep steps, wash between uses with hot soapy water. Better still, keep different

knives for different purposes (one for raw meat and poultry, another for produce) and wash after use.

### **Keep raw and cooked separate.**

Never place cooked foods back on the same plate (or bowl, or cutting board....) that previously held raw food (even raw vegetables and fruits, since some can carry bacteria). Which means that after you transfer those raw burgers from the plate to the grill, go back inside for a new plate to put the cooked burgers on.

## **KEEP YOUR FOOD SAFE**

To ensure what goes into the mouth of babes (and the rest of your family) is as safe as it is nourishing, keep these recommendations in mind when preparing, storing, and serving foods for your family:

**Keep cold foods cold** (at or below 40°F). Refrigerate foods that won't be served or cooked immediately and refrigerate or freeze leftovers as soon as possible (that after-dinner coffee and conversation can wait until after cleanup).

**Keep hot foods hot** (at or above 140°F) until serving. Reheat leftovers thoroughly until hot and steaming; bring gravy and soups to a rolling boil before you ladle them up.

**Don't refreeze foods** that have been thawed at room temperature, brought to room temperature after thawing, or been kept more than a day or two after thawing, even in the refrigerator.

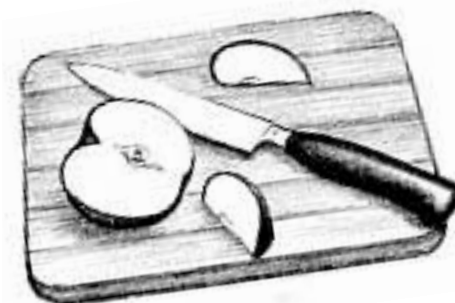
**Wash the lids** of canned foods before opening to keep dirt and bacteria from getting into the food. Also, clean the

blade of the can opener after each use, and pop it periodically into the dishwasher for a thorough cleaning.

**Check labels** and don't use foods that have passed their expiration dates. When in doubt, throw it out — even if there are no obvious signs of spoilage. Definitely throw out any food that has an off-color or odor.

**Don't double dip** (dip a chip into salsa, take a bite, and then dip the same chip again) or eat straight from a container with the same spoon. Bacteria from your mouth can contaminate the food. The same double-dipping rule applies to baby food. Take what you'll need out of the baby food

jar and put it into a dish. If you serve your baby directly from the jar, the spoon that's been in the baby's mouth and dipped back into the jar will carry germs with it.



## **GOT (SAFE) MILK?**

Whether your baby's gulping down breastmilk or formula, safe preparation and storage of his or her main source of nutrition is essential. Keep these tips in mind:

### **BREASTMILK**

- ◆ If you're not using pumped breastmilk right away, keep it refrigerated until you're ready to feed it to your baby. (Freshly expressed breastmilk can be stored for up to 48 hours in the fridge).
- ◆ Freeze breastmilk by chilling in the refrigerator for 30 minutes first, and then placing in the freezer. Freezing small quantities (3 to 4 ounces at a time) will minimize waste and allow for easier thawing. You can keep breastmilk safely frozen for three months.
- ◆ Defrost frozen expressed milk by shaking the bag or bottle under lukewarm tap water until defrosted and then use within 30 minutes. You can also let the milk defrost overnight in the refrigerator (just make sure to use the breastmilk within 24 hours). Never use a microwave to defrost or heat breastmilk.

- ◆ Don't refreeze thawed breastmilk. Refrigerate it, and if your baby doesn't drink it within 24 hours, toss it.

### **FORMULA**

- ◆ Always check the expiration date on formula, and don't buy any leaky, dented, or otherwise damaged cans or containers of formula.
- ◆ Mix formula for your baby's bottle according to the directions on the label, and just to be sure those directions haven't changed since the last batch, always do a quick skim. Make sure your hands, the formula container top, and all the mixing utensils are thoroughly cleaned before you mix. Use the enclosed measuring scoop for powdered formulas.
- ◆ If you warm the formula, be sure to use it right away. Germs can grow fast in warm formula, so don't leave it hanging around for too long.
- ◆ Keep prepared formula refrigerated until ready to use, but not for longer than 48 hours.

# Healthy Habits For Your Family

## PASSING ALONG THE CLEAN GENE

Does it seem like your little one is always running around with a runny nose? Or a sore throat? Or a chronic cough? There's a simple reason why. Kids love to hang out (and touch, and share toys) with other kids — other kids with runny noses, sore throats, and coughs. This close contact allows germs to pass back and forth from one child to another (no backs, no takes, finders keepers). What's more, kids use their hands to explore their world (not to mention explore their noses). And babies go one step farther, using their mouths to explore just as much as their hands (one study found that babies perform the object-to-mouth maneuver more than 80 times per hour). Since hand-to-mouth transmission is a virus's favorite way of getting around, it's no wonder germs are having a field day with your children. And once you factor in their less mature immune system — and the fact that children are by nature hygienically challenged — you've got the perfect set-up for the frequent cold program.

So what's a concerned mother or father to do? Following your child around with a disinfecting wipe 24/7 obviously isn't practical (kids move too fast) and could definitely cramp his or her style — and yours. A more sensible approach and a more effective one:

Enlist your offspring in the fight against germs. Teach your little ones the association between germs and the icky sick feeling they don't like, and they'll start to understand the benefits of cleaning up their acts (and washing their hands). Here are a few hygiene lessons that even toddlers can comprehend — and hopefully, comply with:

**Wash up.** Hands down, there's no better way to help stop the spread of germs and viruses than hand washing — and in the case of children, putting hand washing in their own hands. In fact, research shows that simple hand washing with soap and water can reduce the number of infections in children under the age of five by more than 50 percent. Teach your kids to wash their hands after they go to the bathroom, after they come in from playing, before and after they eat, after they've been in contact with an animal, and after they've sneezed or coughed. No soap and water around? Alcohol-based disposable hand wipes, gel, or

### DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that people who wash hands an average of seven times a day have about four times fewer colds than the average person?

spray sanitizers can be just as effective (just make sure you're supervising your kids when they use it). For tips on the best way to get your children to wash their hands, see the box below.

**Cover your mouth** and nose when you sneeze or cough. But instead of telling children to sneeze or cough into their hands (hands they'll promptly use to pass along the germs they just expelled), teach them to use the inside of their elbow. Or better yet, hand them a tissue to use.

**Throw tissues away.** Whether they've used a tissue to sneeze into, blow their nose, or wipe their mouth, keeping that tissue in circulation will keep germs circulating. Teach kids, instead, to toss tissues in the garbage after each use — and then to wash their hands before touching anything, or anyone.

**Avoid touching your mouth,** nose, or eyes as much as possible. Even when there are slim pickings, kids love to pick their noses. But the problem with all that nose touching is that the mucous membranes of the nose become a haven for cold viruses which take up residence there and then multiply, causing cold symptoms (runny nose, sore throat, and so on). So instead of picking on your kids for picking their noses, arm them with the best reason for kicking the picking habit. Explain to them that any time they stick their fingers in their noses (or mouths, or eyes), they're giving yucky germs a ride inside—and a chance to land, multiply, and make them sick. Tell them they can help keep those nasty germs out of their bodies—and help keep themselves healthier—by keeping their fingers out of their noses. Ditto for touching their eyes and mouths, since viruses that get into the

eyes can go straight down the tear duct into the nose and from the mouth straight into the adenoids and throat.

Of course, talking the talk won't be effective unless you also walk the walk (and wash the wash). Putting the hygiene agenda into practice yourself (no skipping hand washing because you're in a rush) will mean your kids will be more likely to get with the anti-germ program, too.

### HAPPY HAND WASHING

Your kids might think a two-second hand wash is enough to send those germs down the drain, but a really thorough hand cleaning requires a solid 20 seconds of rub-a-dub-dubbing. Sound impossible to get your little one to commit 20 seconds to washing up? Not if the scrubbing is good clean fun. Here are some tips:

**Sing along.** To make hand washing fun—and effective—have your child sing “Happy Birthday” or the ABC song two times (three times if he or she is a fast singer) while washing his or her hands. Once the renditions end, so can the hand washing. (You should keep to the 20 second rule too, though it might be more age appropriate if you hummed the tune in your head instead of singing out loud, at least in public.)

**Lather up.** Since your children will need to wash under the fingernails and on the back of the hands, enticing them with foaming soap or encouraging them to “make tons of bubbles” will get the job done with some fun.

**Smell the smell.** Using smelly soaps—with strawberry or lavender scents, for instance—may encourage your little ones to soap up—especially if you ask for a whiff after they've washed up.

**Wash up together.** A game of “I'll wash your hands, you wash mine” will make washing more fun for both of you.

## FIGHTING THE FLU

**F**lu's in season every year — from about October through April. And during each flu season, about 10 percent of the population in this country catches this virus — adding up to a whole lot of runny noses, achy muscles, fever, lethargy, and sore throats. For most flu sufferers, the flu is annoying, uncomfortable, and possibly inconvenient — they'll be miserable for a week or two, and miss at least a few days of work or school. For those whose immune systems are still developing (children) or who are immunocompromised (the elderly; someone who is already ill), a case of the flu can be a lot more serious.

Influenza viruses (aka the flu) are passed around the population two ways: via respiratory droplets (those that are spewed into the air when someone coughs or sneezes), and by hand-to-mouth contact (as when someone touches a flu-infected person or a virus-laden surface and then puts his hand to his or her mouth, nose, or eyes). Unfortunately, once you've caught the flu, there's not much you can do to nip this bug in the bud (the flu is a virus, so antibiotics won't work to get rid of it), and little that will minimize its miseries other than resting, drinking fluids, and taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen for the fever and aches (never give aspirin to little ones or even teenagers with the flu because it can lead to Reye's Syndrome, a life-threatening disease). Luckily, there are ways to

help avoid catching the flu in the first place, and there are ways to reduce the risk of spreading the flu virus if one member of the family has already caught it. Here's what you need to know to help control the flu virus:

**Get the flu shot.** The flu vaccine is approved for infants over six months, and new CDC guidelines recommend that all children up to age 5 (and all their household contacts, including siblings, parents, babysitters, etc.) get the flu shot, as well as those at high risk of complications from the flu (such as pregnant women or those with depressed immune systems or asthma, for example). Many medical experts recommend the vaccine for everyone (including children over 5 and healthy adults). When having your child immunized, make sure it's a thimerisol-free flu vaccine (most are). If your child is a flu-shot first timer, be prepared for an encore, since children who have never been vaccinated against the flu require two shots given one month apart to be protected. The over-five set can skip the shot altogether and opt for Flu Mist, the nasal spray flu vaccine (look Mom, no needles!); ask the pediatrician if Flu Mist is right for your older children.

**Wash, wash, wash.** The most effective way to keep flu germs (like any germs) from bugging your family is hand washing. Make sure everyone in your family washes up — and washes up well — after touching each other, after blowing noses, after going to the bathroom, after coming inside from outdoors, before and after eating, and so on. (See hand washing tips on page 11.)

### DID YOU KNOW?

**D**id you know that 80 percent of germs are spread by touch?

### Keep an eye on those surfaces.

Need a good reason to clean your house? Here's one: Researchers have found that 60 percent of the surfaces tested in homes are infected with influenza viruses during flu season if someone in the household is sick with it. Here's another: The flu virus is hardy — it can survive for 2 days (or even more) on some surfaces. To help reduce the risk of spreading the flu virus, use disinfecting wipes on such often-touched surfaces as bathroom and kitchen countertops, doorknobs, telephones, computer keyboards, toys, tables, and so on.



### THIS SHOT'S FOR GRANDMA AND GRANDPA

**W**ant to help keep the elderly in your life healthy and protected from the flu this year? Vaccinating their grandkids might be one of the best ways to do that. Since young children usually get the flu before the rest of the population (passing the virus around at child care centers, preschools, playgrounds, and on playdates), immunizing them will help keep them from spreading the flu virus to others, like the senior set. Though the elderly should be vaccinated each year, too, as recommended by the CDC, the reality is that the vaccine is less effective in older folks than in young ones. Vaccinating young children can create a herd immunity that indirectly benefits their elders (especially when they close in for those sticky hugs and kisses). Which means that yearly vaccine you're lining up for isn't just good for your child — it's good for grandma and grandpa, too.

## OUT AND ABOUT

**I**t's easy enough to keep your home healthy, but what happens when you venture outside? (You do plan to leave your house — right?) To protect your family from germs, do you have to don protective gloves and masks, avoid touching doorknobs and banisters, and refuse to shake other people's hands? Absolutely not. While you'll almost certainly encounter plenty of germs wherever you go (public bathrooms, elevator buttons, escalator handrails, shopping carts, subway handles, office telephones, to name a few places you'll pick them up), the chances that you'll actually get sick from one of those bugs are pretty slim — especially if you're as diligent about hand washing as you

should be. Still, knowing all those germs are there can be a little gross, and during cold and flu season, a little concerning. So while you don't have to encase yourself in a bubble when you're out and about, you can take these precautions against germs:

**Public bathrooms.** Are you sitting down? Despite what your mother may have told you, the chances that you'll catch something from a public bathroom toilet are minute (even from those scummy gas station ones). That's because such infections can't live long enough on a toilet seat, and in order to infect you, need to enter the genital tract itself — not just touch your bot-



tom. What's more, most public bathrooms are cleaned on a regular basis (maybe even more often than your one at home!), so there's no need to worry too much about germs. Still, so that you're sure there are no feces (someone else's) sitting on the toilet seat along with you, use the paper seat covers provided for you or cover the seat with toilet paper (which probably offers more mental protection than physical protection, since the germs can find their way through the paper), flush with your shoe instead of your hand (unless of course you're lucky enough to be in a bathroom with those automatic — and sometimes scary — toilets), and don't hover over the seat while flushing (because of the water spray). When you wash your hands (and don't forget that crucial step!), use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door (remember, most people don't wash up after using the bathroom).

If you're using a public bathroom to change your baby's diaper, cover the changing table with some paper towels and then use your own changing pad on top of that to lay your baby down. Some family friendly restrooms provide disposable changing table covers, so if they're available, use them.

**Playgrounds.** Would you believe that there are more germs on outdoor playground equipment than on a toilet? It's true. Tests show that more bodily fluids, such as saliva and other things you don't want to know about, hang out on monkey bars, swings, and slides than in public bathrooms — giving you yet another reason to insist your little ones wash their hands after they come in from romping on playground equipment (or better yet, use a hand sanitizer — supervised, of course — before they even get home or in the car).

Another playground tip: bring along

### THE THREE SECOND RULE DEBUNKED

**W**e've all heard it before... If something hits the ground but is picked up within three seconds, it's not contaminated with germs, so it's safe for your child. But it's time to set the record straight. At home, a dropped object is usually safe for munching or sucking — even if it has been there for longer than three seconds. But if your child drops his or her drool-laden pacifier, chewed-on cracker, or tear-soaked favorite toy on the ground outside (the same outside where dogs take bathroom breaks, cigarette stubs lay waste, and mucousy spit from passing motorists form puddles), it can be contaminated instantly (especially if the dropped item is damp or wet). So don't give your second hand a second glance. To play it safe, switch out the old pacy for a new one, pull out a spare cracker, or distract him or her with a new toy.

bottled water or juice boxes for your kids instead of letting them sip from the water fountain. You don't want to know how many germs are lurking there (in a word: plenty).

**The family car.** Every time you pile the kids into the car, chances are there are some unwanted passengers ready to hitch a ride. Yes, there are germs in the family car, and in some cases, there may even be more in the car than in your bathroom (after all, when was the last time you sprayed disinfectant in the car?). Between drooly babies, four-legged friends, spilled juices, food sloppiness, and, yes, red light nose picking, the car is a veritable home away from home for germs.

So, (and here we go again) wash your hands when you return home from a trip in the car, vacuum and wipe down car surfaces (steering wheel, door handles, etc.) often, try to limit the amount

of food, drinks (including those in baby bottles) that get consumed in the car (have the family meals in the kitchen instead), wipe up spills as soon as they happen (bacteria love moist environments), and keep a garbage bag

in the car for all the trash (and replace it weekly — or more). Be sure, too, to wipe down your baby's car seat often and wash the seat cover every few months (or when it gets visibly dirty).

## CHILD CARE CENTERS

**T**here are more children in child care than ever before (more than 11 million children under the age of 5 are in out-of-home child care centers) — and where there are lots of children, there are usually lots of germs to go around. In fact, studies show that children in child care tend to catch more colds, more stomach bugs, and more ear infections while enrolled than those not in child care (no surprise there.) With those statistics in mind, check out the health and sanitation guidelines at your son or daughter's child care center to see if they make the grade. Here are some questions you can ask:

- ◆ **How many children do you have at the child care center? In individual classes?** Smaller class size is better when it comes to exposure to germs that cause colds and infections.
- ◆ **How often do you clean the toys? How do you clean the toys?** Once every two days with a part bleach, part water solution, or warm soapy water is recommended for hard plastic toys. Stuffed animals should be washed in hot water and soap weekly.
- ◆ **How often does the staff wash their hands?** Look for an answer that includes the following: After their arrival, after playing outside with the children, after going to the bathroom or assisting a child at the toilet, before and after eating and serving lunch,

before and after changing diapers, after wiping noses, before giving medication to a child, and after handling garbage.

- ◆ **How often do you have the children wash their hands? Does someone watch the children washing their hands?** The answer should be often (similar to above) and yes.
- ◆ **How many sinks do you have?** Ideally, there should be one near the changing table and one for the children to use. A separate one near the food prep area is also a plus.
- ◆ **How often is the sandbox cleaned?** Every two weeks is a good idea. The sandbox should remain covered when not in use.
- ◆ **How often is the bathroom cleaned? The food prep area? The changing table?** Daily, at the very least.
- ◆ **What is your policy about allowing sick children to come to child care?** Children with diarrhea, respiratory illnesses, or fever should not be around other children. Also ask about the policy on rashes, runny noses, children on antibiotics, and so on.
- ◆ **What are your immunization requirements?** Are children required to get the flu shots? You'll want to make sure all the children are properly immunized.

<sup>1</sup>All bleach mentions in this guide refer to regular, unscented, disinfecting bleach.



**The What to Expect Foundation** is a non-profit that helps families in need expect healthier pregnancies, safer deliveries, and happier babies. The Foundation's Baby Basics Program provides free prenatal health literacy education and support to low-income families, and has reached over 200,000 expecting women nationwide. To learn how you can help, go to **[www.whattoexpect.org](http://www.whattoexpect.org)**.

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The *What To Expect Guide To A Healthy Home*, is **free**.

To order a copy of this guide for your family,  
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**I**n this comprehensive guide full of easy-to-use tips and practical advice to help keep your home healthier, Heidi Murkoff, author of the bestselling *What To Expect* pregnancy and parenting series, helps families take on germs and win!

### **KEEP YOUR HOME HEALTHY AND LEARN:**

- ◆ Where germs like to hide in the kitchen, bathroom, and nursery, and some simple things you can do to stop them from spreading.
- ◆ An explanation of the CDC guidelines for flu vaccinations for babies and toddlers and other flu fighting tips for the entire family.
- ◆ Why it's a great idea to teach children to wash their hands regularly and how to pass along the "clean gene."
- ◆ Questions to ask child care providers and nursery schools about their hygiene protocols so one sick child doesn't infect the whole class.
- ◆ How little hands can handle germs in the playground.
- ◆ Tips for the safe handling of breastmilk, baby food, and much, much more...



***The Clorox Company has provided a grant of \$1 million to the What to Expect Foundation. The entire donation goes to support the Foundation's Baby Basics Program, which helps families in need expect healthier pregnancies, safer deliveries, and happier babies.***



*The What to Expect Foundation*

**HEIDI MURKOFF** is the mom who wrote *What To Expect*, the bestselling series that has helped over 27 million families from pregnancy through their child's toddler years. Heidi and **The What to Expect Foundation** are committed to helping every family know what to expect—which is why she donated all of her time and services for this program.