

# Tips for Keeping Flu Out of the Classroom

**VALUE  
HEALTH**  
PROTECT AGAINST  
**INFLUENZA**

Teachers are a crucial link in the prevention chain. What you teach, model, and make time for in your day will help your students — and you — stay healthy through the flu season. Below are some suggestions for communicating messages about flu to your students — and for safeguarding your own health.

## **Teach students the “Happy Birthday” trick**

Believe it or not, there really is a right way (and lots of wrong ways) to wash your hands.

The right way is to rub your hands together for 20 seconds using soap and clean, warm, running water. For younger students, consider teaching them to sing “Happy Birthday” twice through while they wash, which takes approximately 20 seconds.

## **Consider taking a hand-washing field trip**

For younger students, take the whole class to the bathroom to practice.

## **Post notices on construction paper around the classroom and in bathrooms reminding students to wash their hands:**

- ✓ Before and after eating
- ✓ After going to the bathroom
- ✓ After blowing their noses, coughing or sneezing
- ✓ After handling an animal
- ✓ After handling food waste or trash

## **Teach students “cough and sneeze etiquette”**

The proper way to cough or sneeze is in the crook of your arm, with your sleeve covering your nose and mouth. This keeps you from contaminating your hands and then spreading germs or virus. Teach younger students this simple rhyme: “When you cough or sneeze use your sleeve, please!”

## **Have a flu-prevention poster contest in your classroom**

Teach students the basics of cough and sneeze etiquette and handwashing, then ask them to illustrate what they’ve learned by holding a (everybody wins) poster contest. Hang the posters in the classroom and lead a classroom discussion about them.

## **Remember, teachers should also wash their hands**

Wash your hands in the instances noted above, as well as in the following situations:

- ✓ After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom
- ✓ Before and after tending to a sick student
- ✓ Before and after treating a cut or wound

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### ***Invite the school nurse to speak to your class***

Children enjoy having special visitors in the classroom. Work with the school nurse to see if she can talk to your students about germs, how they are spread, and what you can do about them.

### ***Keep alcohol-based sanitizer and handwipes handy***

It probably isn't practical for you to leave the classroom and wash your hands as often as you'd like. Wipes or sanitizers are a good alternative when you can't leave the classroom. You might also consider suggesting to parents that they provide sanitizers for their older children to use while at school. Remember: Sanitizers should be stored out of reach of very young children and used only with your supervision.

### ***Get vaccinated***

You can help keep both your students and yourself healthy by getting vaccinated for flu every year. The ideal time to get the vaccine is October or November, but if you haven't gotten one by then it's not too late. Flu season lasts

until April, and has been known to peak as late as May. Therefore, the Virginia Department of Health recommends receiving your vaccination from October through April.

### ***If you don't feel well, stay home***

A day spent with a substitute teacher is far better for your students than a week spent at home with the flu.

### ***Keep your classroom clean***

Toys and other items that are shared should be cleaned at least once a day with a disinfectant that is labeled by the Environmental Protection Agency for defense against bacteria and viruses, or as a hospital disinfectant. You can also use a chlorine bleach solution — mix about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a cup of bleach with a gallon of cool water. Be sure to keep cleaning supplies out of children's reach.

### ***Find additional ideas and resources***

Check out the School Network for Absentee Prevention at [www.itsasnap.org](http://www.itsasnap.org) for more information and materials about integrating hand-washing lessons into your classroom.