

Cover your Coughs and Sneezes the Right Way!

A resource for teachers



Although they are very tiny and can only be seen with a microscope, germs can cause big problems during cold and flu season. Stopping the germs from spreading from child to child and causing illness can be frustrating for school staff looking for ways to break the cycle.

The goal of this fact sheet is to highlight an important infection prevention strategy – respiratory etiquette. In the past, children were taught to cover their coughs and sneezes by using their hands. If their hands were not washed or cleaned right away, their germs were transferred to other surfaces and could be then passed on.

Today, we know the correct way to prevent the spread of illness-causing germs is by covering coughs and sneezes using a tissue or the upper sleeve.

CORRECT TECHNIQUE

Correct respiratory etiquette involves:

- Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Putting all used tissues in the waste basket/garbage right away.
- Coughing or sneezing into the upper sleeve, not the hands, if a tissue is not available.

- Cleaning hands after coughing or sneezing, either by washing with soap and warm water or by using an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

HELPING STUDENTS LEARN THE CORRECT TECHNIQUE

Often, a tissue is not available. So, the following activities are offered to assist teachers and their students to learn proper respiratory etiquette by covering their coughs and sneezes with their upper sleeve.

1. Review the proper technique.

Teachers can familiarize themselves with the correct technique by watching the video “Why Don’t We Do it in Our Sleeves?” from OtoRhinoLounsborgology Productions (2006). This video can be borrowed from the Health Unit’s library or viewed online at coughsafe.com/media.html

A “Cover Your Coughs and Sneezes” poster is also available from the Health Unit for posting and distributing. Visit tbdhu.com/id to download a copy or call your Health Promoting School Nurse.

2. Demonstrate improper and proper technique and explain the difference.

With the students watching, some show incorrect technique (e.g. coughing into their hands) and then the correct technique. Discuss with the students why some examples trap germs (e.g. tissue and sleeve) and others spread germs (e.g. hands).

See reverse for more information.

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3. Have the students practice proper technique.

The children can then take turns practicing their technique by coughing and sneezing into their upper sleeves. Teachers may want to hold a “Do it in Your Sleeve” contest as shown in the video. The students can be judged on their technique and the teacher can provide feedback when needed.

For younger children the activity can be reinforced during circle time by using songs. Here is an example sung to the tune of “Frère Jacques”:

*Are you coughing?
Are you sneezing?
Cover your mouth.
Cover your nose.
Germs are always flying.
Germs are always flying.
Use your sleeve.
Use your sleeve.*

4. Reinforce by modelling the correct technique.

Teachers can model the correct technique as a way to reinforce behaviour.

A fact sheet for parents is available so they can also learn and model the correct technique at home. Visit tbdhu.com/id to download a copy, or call your Health Promoting School Nurse.

5. Monitor and provide positive reinforcement.

Staff can reward individual children by giving stickers to those caught covering a cough or sneeze. The activity can be adapted into a non-competitive, group activity by posting a wall chart and collectively recording every child caught doing it the right way.

It is important to teach proper techniques early in life so children will learn and continue to use these techniques that will prevent and control the spread of infections. Teachers can provide a supportive environment to learn and reinforce these important health behaviours.

*Cover your mouth,
cover your nose.
Use a clean tissue
for all your blows!
No tissue in sight?
Don't despair.
Use your sleeve to keep
germs out of the air!*