



Is your house hit with the flu? 7 cleaning tips to keep it from spreading

There's no doubt about it, this flu season has been brutal. But you're not powerless when it comes to keeping the illness at bay. Just follow the recommendations of Dr. Tanya Altmann, pediatrician and spokesperson for Clorox, and Meg Roberts, president of [Molly Maid](#) cleaning company, and you'll help keep flu germs from spreading.

1. Quarantine the sick person

The flu spreads when the sick person [coughs, sneezes or even talks](#), affecting people as far as 6 feet away! Flu germs are also spread by touching a surface that has flu viruses on it. That's why Roberts recommends keeping the sick person confined to one room and one bathroom. It reduces exposure to the rest of the family, and limits the number of rooms you have to disinfect.

2. Disinfect surfaces

Since the flu virus can live on hard surfaces for 24 hours, disinfect surfaces that the sick person has touched, paying special attention to the sick person's bedroom and bathroom. Use an antibacterial cleaner on key spots such as: tabletops, countertops, remote controls, computer keyboards, doorknobs, sinks, light switches, faucet handles, sinks, countertop, tub and toilet (including the entire seat and the toilet handle).



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“To disinfect a surface,” say Altmann, “wipe so that the surface remains visibly wet for four minutes and then let it dry.”

Another option is to disinfect hard surfaces by wiping or mopping with a solution of 1/2 cup of bleach per gallon of water. Allow the solution to be in contact with the surface for at least five minutes. Rinse and air-dry.

Take care not to spread germs unintentionally. After mopping floors in the contaminated room and the designated bathroom, disinfect the mop head by soaking it for 15-20 minutes in a solution of 1/2 cup bleach and one gallon of water. Also, do not re-use cleaning cloths in other parts of the house. Toss them in the washer instead.

To sanitize kiddie items such as non-electric plastic/metal toys, sippy cups, teething rings, bottle nipples and dishes, wash items first then soak them for two minutes in a solution of 2 teaspoons of bleach per gallon of water. Rinse in warm water then air dry.

3. Three timely tips for the bathroom

Use disposable cups.

Never share hand towels or bath towels with a sick person. Use paper towels instead of cloth hand towels to help prevent the spread of germs.

Keep toothbrushes uncovered and isolate the toothbrush of the sick person from those of other family members.

4. Reduce germs in the bedroom

Add these ideas to your regular bedroom-cleaning regimen:

Place a wastebasket in the sick room to catch all those used tissues — and make sure to line the basket with a plastic grocery bag to minimize contact with germs. Empty at least once a day, replacing bags each time.

Sometimes the wastebasket get grungy — especially if the sick person vomits in it. To disinfect it, rinse the wastebasket well then wipe the inside and outside with a solution of 1/2 cup bleach and 3/4 gallon of water. Allow two minutes for disinfecting then rinse with warm water and air dry.

Dust can be extra irritating when someone's sick, so Roberts recommends dusting furniture — especially the headboard and the nightstand — and vacuuming the floor. Remember corners and under the bed.

Move stale air out and fresh air in by opening the windows every day. You don't have to leave them open all day, just long enough to freshen the room.

5. Take care when doing laundry

A sick person's towels, bedding and clothes (and the clothes of the caregiver, too) are full of germs, so don't "hug" dirty clothes as you take them to the washer. This could spread the germs onto you. Instead, transport dirty clothes in a laundry basket and wash your hands after loading the washer.

Sanitize your laundry with bleach — regular bleach for whites and color-safe bleach for colors. (Be sure to follow fabric care instructions on label.) Add 2/3 cup of bleach (1/3 cup for HE machines) to the dispenser or wash water. Add clothes and start to wash, making sure the laundry is in contact with the bleach solution for ten minutes, says Altmann.

After washing the bed sheets, clothes and towels of a sick family member, take time to [wash your washing machine](#). The moist environment in the washer is a breeding ground for germs. Run an empty cycle of hot water and add bleach to the dispenser, then run an additional cycle to ensure the bleach is gone.

6. Don't use sponges for cleaning

While the flu's in your home, use disposable paper towels or [germ-grabbing microfiber cloths for cleaning](#). Just remember to wash microfiber cloths daily.

7. A word to the wise

Clean hands are just as important as a clean house, especially during flu season. To kill germs, wash hands all over with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds. (For kids, sing "Happy Birthday" twice.) Everyone should wash hands after using the bathroom, being outside or being in contact with the sick person; before eating, and before touching the eyes, nose or mouth. (That's usually how germs enter your body and get you sick.)

If you haven't already done so, get the flu shot. The [FDA](#) states that [it's not too late because flu activity can last as late as May in the U.S.](#)

If you get the flu, the [CDC](#) recommends taking an antiviral medication like Tamiflu, which can be effective even if taken beyond the recommended second day of sickness.