

## **PREVENTION OF TRANSMITTABLE DISEASES**

Infectious diseases kill more people worldwide than any other single cause. Infectious diseases are caused by germs. Germs are tiny living things that are found everywhere - in air, soil and water. You can get infected by touching, eating, drinking or breathing something that contains a germ. Germs can also spread through animal and insect bites. Vaccines, proper hand washing and medicines can help prevent infections.

With germs so common and seemingly everywhere you need to know ways to minimize the risk of getting them.

Infectious diseases spread through two types of contact:

### **DIRECT CONTACT**

- **Person to person.** This can occur when an individual with the bacterium or virus touches, coughs on or kisses someone who isn't infected.
- **Animal to person.** Your household pet might seem harmless, but pets can carry many germs. Being bitten or scratched by an infected animal can make you sick. Handling animal waste can be hazardous, too.
- **Mother to unborn child.** A pregnant woman may pass germs that cause infectious diseases to her unborn baby. Germs can pass through the placenta, as is the case of the AIDS.

### **INDIRECT CONTACT**

Disease-causing organisms can also be passed along by indirect contact. Many germs can linger on an inanimate object, such as a tabletop, doorknob or faucet handle. When you touch the same doorknob grasped by someone ill with the flu or a cold, for example, you can pick up the germs he or she left behind. If you then touch your eyes, mouth or nose before washing your hands, you may become infected.

- **Droplet transmission**

When you cough or sneeze, you expel droplets into the air around you. When you're sick with a cold or the flu — or any number of other illnesses — these droplets contain the germ that caused your illness. Spread of infectious disease in this manner is called droplet spread or droplet transmission.

Droplets travel only about three feet because they're usually too large to stay suspended in the air for a long time. However, if a droplet from an

infected person comes in contact with your eyes, nose or mouth, you may soon experience symptoms of the illness. Crowded, indoor environments may promote the chances of droplet transmission — which may explain the increase in respiratory infections in the winter months.

Infectious diseases spread through insect bites and contaminated food as well

- **Bites and stings**

Some germs rely on insect carriers — such as mosquitoes, fleas, lice or ticks — to move from host to host. These carriers are known as vectors. Mosquitoes can carry the malaria parasite or West Nile virus, and deer ticks may carry the bacterium that causes Lyme disease.

- **Food contamination**

Another way disease-causing germs can infect you is through contaminated food and water. Food is often the vehicle that spreads the germs and causes the illness. For instance, contamination with *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) is common. *E. coli* is a bacterium present in or on certain foods — such as undercooked hamburger or unwashed fruits or vegetables.

- **DECREASE YOUR RISK OF INFECTING YOURSELF OR OTHERS Wash your hands often.** This is especially important before and after preparing food, before eating and after using the toilet.



- **Get vaccinated.** Immunization can drastically reduce your chances of contracting many diseases. Make sure to keep your recommended vaccinations, as well as your children's, up-to-date.
- **Use antibiotics sensibly.** Only take antibiotics when necessary. And if they're prescribed, take them exactly as directed — don't stop taking them early because your symptoms have gone away.
- **Stay at home if you have signs and symptoms of an infection.** Don't go to work if you are vomiting, have diarrhea or are running a fever. Don't send your child to school if he or she has these signs and symptoms, either.
- **Be smart about food preparation.** Keep counters and other kitchen surfaces clean when preparing meals. In addition, promptly refrigerate leftovers.
- **Pay special attention to cleaning the 'hot zones' in your home.** These include the kitchen and bathroom — two rooms that can have high concentrations of bacteria and other infectious agents.
- **Don't share personal items.** Use your own toothbrush, comb and razor blade. Avoid sharing drinking glasses or dining utensils.
- **Travel wisely.** Don't travel when you're ill. Depending on where your travels take you, talk to your doctor about any special immunizations you may need.
- **Keep your pets healthy.** Bring your pet to a veterinarian for regular care and vaccinations. Keep your pet's living area clean.

