

# You might be 'fluphobic' if ...

October 23 2009, By Mary Schmich

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The moment it became clear that I was on the verge of a full-blown case of the disease, I was gazing at an ATM keypad.

Was it the relentless media coverage of H1N1? Was it those TV commercials that make [germs](#) look like hairy rodents?

Whatever the provocation, with my fingers poised over the money machine, I had a thought: Maybe I should enter my PIN with my elbow.

In that instant, I realized I was coming down with something more widespread than the [flu](#) -- fluphobia.

Fluphobia is sweeping the nation and inspiring innovative germ-fighting strategies. It has turned the elbow into the most versatile body part since the thumb, though in the case of the ATM, I settled for a knuckle.

The fluphobic person is aware of germ-fighting basics: Wash your hands frequently and well. Cover your sneeze and cough, preferably with your arm, not your hand. Keep your hands away from your face.

But that's not enough for the fluphobe. He or she is an inventor, a contortionist, cleverly deploying the knuckle, the knee, the foot, the hip and the elbow in ways that would impress Cirque du Soleil.

"I always use a sleeve or bottom of a shirt to open restroom doors, ALWAYS foot flush," reported Cheryl Tolcher when I quizzed people on [Facebook](#) about their fluphobic practices. "Push doors are pushed

with elbows, side or hip. I sneeze down my shirt."

The line is fine between fluphobia and intelligent caution. The above practices could be signs of either one. So could the following:

You steer the grocery cart with your forearms, not your hands.

You carry your own pen to sign credit card receipts.

You push through revolving doors with an elbow, a forearm or a fist covered in a sleeve you've learned to grasp from the inside.

You press elevator buttons with an elbow, a knuckle or a pen tip.

You open the "L" door with your elbow and grip the bus strap only if you're wearing gloves.

You stock up on Clorox wipes and use them on your roommates' or work-mates' stuff, too, whether or not they want it.

"I now carry waterless liquid cleaner in my purse," wrote Annette Wehrli, "and I have been wiping down everything from doorknobs to car handles to drawer pulls much more often."

A couple of fluphobes in my Facebook survey reported holding their breath.

"I hold my breath when someone sneezes in the elevator and get off at the next stop even if it's not mine!" wrote one.

If hand sanitizer is a fluphobe's best friend, paper towels are a close second, especially when exiting a public bathroom.

"Although by using those you identify yourself as crazy," wrote a Facebook friend.

I recently saw a guy at the gym wrap paper towels around the free weights. Napkins also do extra germ-fighting duty.

"At a reception, brunch or other gathering where there's a salad bar or buffet," wrote Beverly Loder, "I keep a napkin in my hand to pick up the serving utensils."

Some fluphobic strategies invite argument. Foot flushing? Isn't that rude to the people who flush with their hands? Holding your breath? The bigger worry is the germs that land on you.

I believe in a cautious though not fearful approach to germs. And yet sometimes bad germs happen to people with the best of knuckles, elbows and intentions. I have the cold to prove it.

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