

How to spare family and coworkers your flu misery

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(HealthDay)—You've caught the flu, but you have to go to work and you

can't desert your family. What do you do?

Believe it or not, one expert says there are ways to stem the spread of sickness—even if you can't avoid being around other people.

It sounds like a tall order during this brutal flu season, with 48 U.S. states reporting widespread infection and no signs that things are easing up. On top of that, people are being hospitalized with [flu complications](#) in record numbers—almost 60 per 100,000 people for the week ending Feb. 3.

"Overall hospitalizations are now significantly higher than what we've seen for this time of year since our current tracking system began almost a decade ago, in 2010," Dr. Anne Schuchat, acting director for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said last week.

Despite those scary statistics, you can improve the odds for others even if you are in the flu's grip.

First, the basics: "If you have to cough or sneeze, make sure you do it into the crook of your elbow or a facial tissue, and not into your hands," said Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency room physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. "Dispose of the tissue in a wastebasket immediately, don't put it in your pocket or on your desktop."

Washing your hands often is also wise, he said, but more critical is how you wash them.

"When you wash your hands, it's important to vigorously scrub them for 20 seconds," Glatter stressed. "It's the mechanical action and time spent scrubbing which help to reduce the number of bacterial and viral particles on your hands, sending them down the drain."

You can do even more to spare your co-workers and loved ones the misery of the flu, he noted.

Face masks can't hurt, Glatter said, since the [flu virus](#) is spread by droplets associated with coughing. It's also spread by direct contact with sick people and surfaces that have been contaminated by sick people.

The flu is a hardy virus, and can survive on hard surfaces and doorknobs up to 24 hours, he said. One of the most common ways to catch the flu is to touch your face after you touch an infected surface such as a desktop, doorknob, computer keyboard or smartphone.

So, pay attention and focus on not touching the inner part of your eyes, nose or mouth as a primary way to reduce your risk of contracting the flu, Glatter emphasized.

More information: Visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for more flu prevention tips.

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