

WHEENK! HEALTH

SICK OF BEING SICK SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO?

IT HAPPENS EVERY YEAR AT THIS TIME. COLDS AND THE FLU PASS THROUGH SCHOOLS AND WORKPLACES LIKE WILDFIRE AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU'RE DOWN FOR THE COUNT. VIGILANCE ABOUT HAND HYGIENE AND A FEW OTHER PRECAUTIONS CAN HELP KEEP YOU OUT OF THE LINE OF FIRE.

IF YOU'RE THE TYPE OF PERSON WHO TRIES DESPERATELY TO AVOID SITTING NEXT TO A SNIFFLING, SNEEZING, WHEEZING COLLEAGUE DURING A MEETING, YOU'VE GOT GOOD REASON. "IF YOU HAD X-RAY VISION," SAYS DR. WILLIAM SCHAFFNER, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR OF THE VANDERBILT DEPARTMENT OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES, "YOU WOULD SEE A CLOUD OF VIRUSES AROUND THEM. EVERY TIME THEY EXHALE, RESPIRATORY VIRUSES COME OUT, EXTENDING ABOUT THREE FEET, CREATING A CLOUD AROUND THEM." BUT THAT'S NOT THE ONLY WAY YOU COULD FALL ILL. RESEARCH OUT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA HEALTH SYSTEM IN 2006 SHOWED THAT PEOPLE INFECTED WITH RHINOVIRUS, THE CAUSE OF HALF OF ALL COLDS, CAN CONTAMINATE COMMON OBJECTS, SUCH AS LIGHT SWITCHES, TELEPHONES AND DOOR HANDLES, WHICH CAN THEN INFECT OTHERS. TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THE DAY BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY COME DOWN WITH A COLD YOU'RE ALREADY SHEDDING VIRUS. IN OTHER WORDS, THE CO-WORKER WHO HOVERED OVER YOUR DESK THE OTHER DAY COULD BE SICK BUT NOT HAVE SYMPTOMS YET.

SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **WASH YOUR HANDS:** THOROUGHLY AND FREQUENTLY. MOST ORGANISMS ARE MORE EASILY TRANSMITTED THROUGH HAND CONTACT THAN VIA SNEEZES. ONCE YOU COME INTO CONTACT WITH A VIRUS, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS RUB YOUR NOSE, SCRATCH THE AREA AROUND YOUR EYES OR TOUCH YOUR MOUTH AND YOU'RE IN TROUBLE.
- **AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE:** WITH UNWASHED HANDS. IT'S HARDER THAN YOU THINK. IF YOU HAVE AN ITCH ON YOUR FACE, YOU TEND TO SCRATCH IT WITHOUT STOPPING TO THINK ABOUT WHETHER YOUR HANDS ARE CLEAN.
- **CAREFUL CONTACT:** LIMIT YOUR HAND TO HAND CONTACT WITH PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE SICK. IF YOU NEED TO SHAKE HANDS WITH OTHERS, MAKE SURE YOU WASH UP OR USE A HAND SANITIZER AFTERWARD.
- **CALL IN SICK:** EXPERTS SAY THAT IN THE 24 HOURS BEFORE YOU COME DOWN WITH A COLD YOU'RE ACTUALLY EXCRETING A LARGE AMOUNT OF THE VIRUS, WHICH CAN INFECT OTHERS. IF YOU'RE STARTING TO FEEL LOUSY, LISTEN TO YOUR BODY AND CALL IN SICK. BY TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO RECOVER MORE QUICKLY AND SAVE YOUR COLLEAGUES FROM CATCHING YOUR COLD.
- **BE HEALTHY:** YOUR IMMUNITY IS BASICALLY A FUNCTION OF HOW HEALTHY YOU ARE OVERALL. BEING HEALTHY IS A GREAT PROACTIVE WAY TO WARD OFF COLDS AND FLU. THAT MEANS NO SMOKING, EXERCISING REGULARLY, GETTING EIGHT HOURS OF SLEEP EVERY NIGHT, EATING HEALTHFULLY AND DRINKING PLENTY OF CLEAR FLUIDS, ESPECIALLY WATER.
- **TO VACCINATE OR NOT TO VACCINATE:** BE SURE TO DISCUSS THE INFLUENZA VACCINE WITH YOUR DOCTOR. PEOPLE WHO ARE AT INCREASED RISK OF COMPLICATIONS MAY WANT TO GET VACCINATED. HOWEVER, THE FLU SHOT MAY NOT BE RECOMMENDED FOR ALL PEOPLE. BY CONSIDERING YOUR HEALTH HISTORY ALONG WITH YOUR OWN PERSONAL PROFILE OF RISKS AND BENEFITS, YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO MAKE THE DECISION THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU.

OF COURSE, NO MATTER HOW STRONG YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM IS OR HOW MANY PRECAUTIONS YOU TAKE YOU MAY NOT BE ABLE TO AVOID EVERY COLD THAT PASSES THROUGH YOUR OFFICE OR SCHOOL. BUT IT'S ALWAYS WORTH A SHOT.



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