



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION

SUMMARY

We've all caught some kind of infection, or sickness, from someone else. These illnesses are known as communicable or contagious diseases because they are spread from one person to another. They may occur when a healthy person becomes infected through contact with a sick person or by touching something that a sick person has come in contact with. Communicable diseases are caused by germs—both viruses and bacteria—and some examples include colds, flu, or strep throat. You can catch infections in several different ways, but all involve germs coming in contact with mucous membranes (like your eyes, nose, or mouth) or through breaks in the skin (like a cut or a hangnail).

GENERAL INFORMATION

While most communicable diseases are treatable, preventing the infection is the best approach. Communicable infections spread in many ways, including:

- Putting your hands in your mouth or touching your nose with germs on your hands.
- Inhaling after an ill person nearby has coughed or sneezed.
- Eating food contaminated from improper storage, handling food without proper handwashing, or consuming food that someone who is ill sneezes or coughs around.
- Touching blood, vomit, or stool from an infected person.

Touching surfaces that have been contaminated, such as light switches, tables, or faucet handles, can also lead to an infection. For example, a towel, sleeping bag, or even a bar of soap that a sick person has used can have germs on it. It may take hours for the germs to die unless there is proper cleaning. To clean surfaces, use a diluted bleach solution or commercial disinfectant.

Good handwashing is the most important step you can take to prevent spreading germs. Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is OK for many situations, but if blood or soiling of the hands is present, or if you have diarrhea, then wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. To help reduce airborne germs, encourage everyone to cough and sneeze into an elbow or shoulder. Other ways to reduce the spread of diseases include:

- Do not touch obviously infected areas (like a fever blister or wound).
- Wear gloves when there is the potential for contact with an infected person or object. Use gloves if you must clean up any body fluids, clean the toilet, or give first aid. Used gloves are contaminated. Remove and discard them before touching anything or anybody else, and wash your hands after removing the gloves.
- Do not share any personal items like combs, cups, towels, soap, or eating utensils.
- If your immune system is not working well or you have not received all recommended vaccines, be sure to stay away from anyone who is ill.
- If you have an infection, **stay away from others.** (See “Resources” below.) A quarantine (isolation) may be useful in some situations. When someone feels better after taking medicine, it does not mean the individual is no longer infectious. If possible, stay at home until you are symptom-free, without medication, for at least 24–48 hours. If you are uncertain when it is OK to return to an activity, talk to your doctor.

RESOURCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives: www.cdc.gov/handwashing/
 - Preventing the Flu: Good Health Habits Can Help Stop Germs: www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits/index.htm
- Boy Scouts of America
 - Local Council Membership/Participation Guidelines Regarding Communicable Diseases: https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/communicable_diseases.pdf
 - Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Scouting: Recommendations for Unit and Council Event Leaders: [https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/680-103\(18\)_Prev_of_CommunicableDiseases.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/680-103(18)_Prev_of_CommunicableDiseases.pdf)
 - Pre-Event Medical Screening Checklist: https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/680-102_PreEventChklist.pdf