Colds are most contagious during the first 2 to 4 days after symptoms appear, and may be contagious for up to 3 weeks. You can catch a cold from person-to-person contact or by breathing in virus particles spread through the air by sneezing or coughing. Touching the mouth or nose after touching skin or another surface contaminated with a rhinovirus can also spread a cold.

**Prevention**

Kids should:

* Try to steer clear of anyone who smokes or who has a cold. Virus particles can travel up to 12 feet through the air when someone with a cold coughs or sneezes, and secondhand smoke can make your child more likely to get sick.
* **Wash their hands** thoroughly and frequently, especially after blowing their noses. This is the best way to prevent getting sick.
* Cover their noses and mouths when coughing or sneezing (have them sneeze or cough into a shirtsleeve, though, not their hands — this helps prevent the spread of germs)
* Don’t use the same towels or eating utensils as someone who has a cold. They also shouldn't drink from the same glass, can, or bottle as anyone else — you never know who might be about to come down with a cold and is already spreading the virus.
* Don’t pick up other people's used tissues.

To minimize the germs passed around your family, make frequent hand washing a rule for everyone, especially:

* before eating and cooking
* after using the bathroom
* after cleaning around the house
* after touching animals, including family [pets](http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/pets.html)
* before and after visiting or taking care of any sick friends or relatives
* after blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing
* after being outside (playing, gardening, walking the dog, etc.

Handwashing tips:

* Start with wetting hands with warm water BEFORE applying soap
* Scrub hands with soap for **15-20 seconds** before rinsing hands