

## Don't Let the Flu Ruin Your Holiday Season

*Red Cross Offers Steps to Help Avoid Illness During the Holiday Season*

**(Lansing) December 1, 2009** — With H1N1 flu causing illness all across the country, the American Red Cross has some steps that will lessen the chances of getting sick at all your family get-togethers this holiday season.

"The holidays are a time to enjoy being with family, not to be in bed with the flu," said Sharon Stanley, chief nurse of the American Red Cross.

The holidays are one of the busiest travel periods in the United States. If traveling for the holiday or hosting a family celebration, washing your hands as often as possible is important to help ward off illness. The Red Cross offers the following tips for seasonal safety:



### Tips for Travelers

Before traveling...

- **If sick, stay home.** It's disappointing to not be able to join in the family celebration, but act responsibly for your family's sake.
- It's possible to spread the flu virus one day before actually showing symptoms. Those who have been in close contact with a sick individual should be extra careful about hand washing and covering coughs, and should be very aware of what might be flu symptoms.

While traveling...

- **Wash hands with soap and water** as often as possible. If soap and water aren't available, use **hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.**
- **Use sanitizing wipes** to disinfect hard surfaces such as airplane tray tables, luggage handles, cell phones, door handles and seat armrests.
- Remember to wash hands or use a **hand sanitizer before eating** any meals or snacks. Make sure your hands are clean before you put anything into your mouth.
- **Bring your own blankets,** pillows and earphones to avoid using something which may have been in contact with the flu virus.
- After washing hands in a public restroom, **turn off the faucet with a paper towel.** Then use another paper towel to dry hands and open the door when exiting the restroom.



### Have a safe celebration

Holiday gatherings are all about food, family and friends. Here are some steps that will help keep the celebration happy and healthy:

- **Avoid the usual kisses and handshakes** when greeting friends and family. Use this as an excuse to finally get out of Aunt Bertha's sloppy kisses.
- If hosting the holiday dinner and someone in the household becomes ill, make sure that they can be isolated into a separate area for care, or ask another family member to host dinner to avoid spreading the flu.
- **Wash hands frequently**, before preparing food, while cooking, and especially before eating.
- **Keep plenty of hand soap** in the bathroom, preferably in a pump container. **Use the pretty disposable hand towels** or a roll of paper towels.
- **Don't drink out of anyone else's glass.** Consider using plastic, or labeling cups.
- **For snacks, put out serving utensils** so that people can spoon out their portion instead of reaching in with their hands.

### Remember—

- **always cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and clean hands afterwards.**
- If no tissue is available, **cough or sneeze into the inside of the elbow** or upper arm.
- **Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth to prevent spreading germs.**
- Visit [Redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) for more information on how to keep safe and prepared for any emergency.

### About the American Red Cross:

*The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and provides emotional support to victims of disasters; supplies nearly half of the nation's blood; teaches lifesaving skills; provides international humanitarian aid; and supports military members and their families. The Red Cross is a charitable organization — not a government agency — and depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its mission. For more information, please visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or locally at [www.midmichiganredcross.org](http://www.midmichiganredcross.org).*