



**NL Health  
Services**

Infection Prevention and  
Control

## FACT SHEET

# Respiratory Etiquette Cover Your Cough



## Why should I cover my cough?

Respiratory illnesses, such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), whooping cough, COVID-19, rhinovirus, enterovirus, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), are spread by coughing or sneezing and by unclean hands. Respiratory illnesses travel quickly and easily in crowded places where individuals are in close contact (within 6 feet). They are spread directly during coughing and sneezing and indirectly on unclean hands.

## How do I stop the spread of germs if I am sick?

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze. Throw the used tissue in the waste basket and clean your hands afterwards.
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve/elbow.
- If you have a cough, practice physical distancing of at least 6 feet from others.
- Always clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub after coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home when you are sick and do not visit others.
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels, and other personal items.

## How can I stay healthy?

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with others who are sick, if possible.
- Get vaccinated! Influenza (flu), COVID-19, and pneumococcal (pneumonia) vaccines can prevent some serious respiratory illnesses.

## Respiratory etiquette at a clinic or hospital

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and dispose of the used tissue in the waste basket.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- If you have a cough, you should maintain a 6 feet distance from other people and you should wear a mask to protect others.
- Don't worry if you see staff and other people wearing masks. They are preventing the spread of germs!