

# SNIFF SNIFF...

## YOUR EASY TEAR-OUT GUIDE FOR STOPPING CLASSROOM BUGS



Studies show that teaching is the germiest job. Here's how to deal.

By Margaret Gelbwasser

**M**y first two years of teaching were filled with read alouds, eager faces, a-ha moments, and weekends stuck at home with cold after cold.

No matter how quickly I bolted from students' incoming coughs and sneezes, come winter, I always seemed to get sick again and again.

No doubt you already have a routine for keeping viruses at bay. But since bugs make their way through the classroom at racing speeds, we need to outsmart them before they get to us.

We asked experts to identify the signs of the most common classroom illnesses, plus offer their suggestions for giving those bugs the ax. Here's what they said.

### EVERYDAY COLD AND FLU

**SPOT IT SYMPTOMS:** Sniffles at story time, sneezes in line—plus cough, tummy and muscle aches, and chills

**STOP IT:** "If a child is looking under the weather and puts his head down on the desk, send him to the nurse. The longer you keep him in the classroom, the longer he exposes everyone else," says Mary Ann LoFrumento, MD, author of the *Simply Parenting* series.

**PREVENT IT:** Stock up on antibacterial soaps and gels. Like many teachers, Amy Lindhurst, a kindergarten teacher at Quarles School in Englewood, New Jersey, knows that hand washing keeps

the doctor away. "My kids wash their hands before lunch and after the bathroom, and I give them wipes so they can sanitize their tables. I also spritz their work areas with cleaning solution each night," she says.

### OH NO, IT'S STREP

**SPOT IT SYMPTOMS:** A scratchy old man voice coming from six-year-old Susie, sore throat—plus stomachaches, fever, and headaches, but minus cold symptoms

**STOP IT:** If a child has a fever—a sign of infection—send her home so other kids don't get sick, says Barbara Frankowski, MD, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health.

**PREVENT IT:** Since strep is spread through mouth contact, children should keep their juice boxes to themselves. That means no sharing of food, >>

# expert advice

cups, or utensils either. "It's also important for children to wash or sanitize their hands before they eat to cut the spread of germs," says Frankowski.

## ICK! LICE

**SPOT IT SYMPTOMS:** Hysterical parents, messy and itchy hair, and creepy crawlies the size of sesame seeds behind the ear or nape of the neck, or even tinier nits within the center of the scalp  
**STOP IT:** While frogs prefer lily pads, lice jump from head to head and love to linger on beanbags and under fuzzy hats. Parents may not like this, but infected children can stay in school if they avoid close contact with each other. "Live lice means the child has been exposing others for at least three weeks. He poses no

second-grade teacher Lisa Farrington, "Last year, we made all children put their jackets, scarves, and gloves into garbage bags that closed with ties. We did this all winter and there was never an outbreak." Another tip? Pile on the hair gel, mousse, or spray. It seems to send lice screaming.

## THE MISUNDERSTOOD RINGWORM

**SPOT IT SYMPTOMS:** Look for circular lesions with red and raised borders and a flaky and dry center—not unlike a patch of earth left behind by a UFO—on the arms, face, feet, or scalp. Surprise: No worms are involved.

**STOP IT:** "While there's no need to send the child home," says Rani Gereige, MD, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of South Florida, "she should

## CONJUNCTIVITIS (ALIAS: PINKEYE)

**SPOT IT SYMPTOMS:** From the Things That Make Kids Say "Ewww" category: eye discharge or drainage, usually out of the eye's corner

**STOP IT:** Send the child immediately to the nurse to avoid an epidemic.

**PREVENT IT:** Clean hands are the key to containing those pinkeye germs, says LoFrumento.

## SO-SCARY ASTHMA ATTACKS

**SPOT IT SYMPTOMS:** Breathing difficulties, wheezing, and hacking coughs

**STOP IT:** "Allow a child to self-medicate with his inhaler if he has it with him," says Gereige. If not, send him (immediately) to the nurse's office.

**PREVENT IT:** Because chalk and pollen can be triggers, Gereige advises students with asthma to sit as far from the board as possible. Also, always close all windows during high pollen season.

## GETTING SCHOOLED ON GERMS

Umoja Rufaro, a kindergarten teacher in Washington, D.C., offers tips on teaching kids about those crawlies.

**STICK TO THE BASICS:** Simply explaining and repeating good hygiene fundamentals will help reinforce those stay-healthy rules. Break students up into teams and quiz them on the facts.

### WATCH THOSE HANDS:

Hands can be germ factories. Make it fun by encouraging kids to use their elbows to open doors or link arms instead of holding hands.

**AVOID SHARING:** Forget "share and share alike." Remind students that germs are easily transferred and that keeping their belongings to themselves when they're sick will curb the spread of viruses. □

# Classroom Germs

They're everywhere! We found the top ten virus and bacteria facts that teachers *have* to know (even if you don't want to).

- 1 Top spot for classroom viral presence: student desktop [1]
- 2 Top spot for bacteria presence: water fountain toggle [1]
- 3 Most germey job: teacher (Are we surprised?) [1]
- 4 Germs build up throughout the day. By the afternoon, 50% of classroom surfaces have the flu virus. [1]
- 5 Teacher illness-related absences average 5.3 days a year. [2]

6 622 million school days are lost each year in the US due to the common cold. [3]

7 The cold season starts in late August and lasts until April. [3]

8 Forty percent of parents have sent a child to school sick. [4]

9 Seventy-four percent of teachers believe they have missed school because of illnesses picked up from their students. [5]

10 Germs can survive on surfaces for up to 72 hours! [1]

SOURCES: [1] STUDY BY CHARLES P. GERBA, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, 2005; [2] IT'S A SNAP, CLEAN HANDS STATISTICS, [3] CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [4] JUNE 2006 CLOROX SURVEY, [5] 2005 SCHOLASTIC.COM SURVEY

additional danger to other children at this point and should not be deprived of a day's education," says Frankowski. But, she advises, parents should be notified immediately so the child can begin treatment that evening.

**PREVENT IT:** The Robert Mascenik School in Iselin, New Jersey, gave new meaning to taking out the trash. Says

not participate in close contact activities since ringworm is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact." It is also necessary to receive 24 hours of treatment before the student can return to school.

**PREVENT IT:** Keep washing those hands, cover the lesions with clothing, and tell kids to keep their combs and hats to themselves.