



November | 2011

The flu is just like the holidays - you can almost feel it in the air. If you are hosting - or attending - a family or other holiday gathering this season, with just a little planning you can help ensure it's a healthy and fun happening.

UNINVITING THE FLU TO YOUR NEXT HOLIDAY EVENT



There are several simple things hosts can do to minimize the spread of germs at a family dinner, neighborhood party, or after work get together during the holidays or really any time of the year. In general, avoiding communal serving dishes and minimizing one guest's exposure to another's food and drink are keys to a happy, healthy social gathering.

- Consider offering as much food as possible in single servings. That way, your guests will only touch the food they intend to eat. Make your presentation chic by utilizing fancy ramekins, mini cupcake holders, shot glasses, skewers, or toothpicks. This is an effective way to avoid spreading germs by people touching food they will not be eating.
- Skip the ubiquitous bowl of nuts into which guests reach their hands; instead, put mini-tongs or a spoon in the bowl for ease of serving. In other words, for every dish: a utensil. Supply a ladle for the punch bowl to avoid guests dipping their cups in for refills. If you can replace these utensils throughout the night, all the better. This practice can provide some measure of protection against the spread of germs.
- Do you have good friends in attendance? Ask them to step behind the table and act as "servers" in shifts. If someone is staffing the bar or serving the food, the spread of germs is minimized, as only one person is touching the ice tongs/spatula/etc. at a time. While it would not be fair to ask your friends to be on

duty all night, using a server, even if only during the initial rush for the canapés and beverages can lessen the exposure.

- How will your guests identify their beverages? If disposable cups are used (and plenty of them are biodegradable, so you can still feel green and use disposables...), cups can be personalized with a pen. Using real glassware? Try a trendy wine charm or mark your glass with nail polish. Your guests will only drink from their own glasses and names are easily removed after the party with nail polish remover. You can also try window markers to write on your glasses - the ink comes off in the dishwasher, but not on your hands.
- And for your messy guests - we know who we are - to keep us from licking our fingers, then potentially shaking hands and spreading germs, have plenty of disposable napkins, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes handy and in plain view. In the restroom, keep plenty of antibacterial hand soap, as well as disposable hand towels. While fancy fabric hand towels look nice, paper, disposable hand towels are where it's at when it comes to good health.
- Finally, if you or a loved one in your home gets sick the day of the party: cancel! You can try to quarantine the sick person to his or her bedroom, but you cannot "unspread" the germs he or she may have spread earlier in the day. Your guests will be disappointed, but they will eventually appreciate that you did not expose them to the flu or another illness that they might have for the remainder of the holiday season.

TIPS FOR BEING A HEALTHY PARTY GUEST

- Show up feeling well. If you have been sick, send your condolences, but do not show up at a party with a fever, cold, or the flu.
- Keep greetings to a minimum with "air kisses" and brief hugs.
- Wash your hands often. Wash before eating. Wash after eating. And of course, wash thoroughly after using the restroom.



- If you need to cough or sneeze, wander away from the crowd. Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your sleeve controls your germs. If you do end up coughing or sneezing into your hands, wash them immediately.
- Control your beverage; ensure that you are the only one sipping from it. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Only handle food with your hands once it's been put on your plate, and only with clean hands.
- If you are tasting from another party guest's plate, use your own utensil.



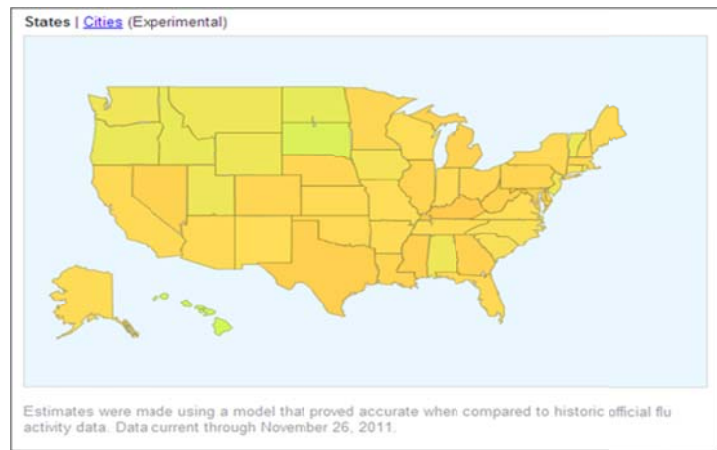
According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, businesses in America lose an average of 2.8 million work days each year due to unplanned absences--costing more than \$74 billion. Of that total, nearly \$55 billion

is attributed to illness. With these tips and tricks for being a healthy party host and guest focused on staying well while having fun, you can avoid being a statistic while still enjoying the holidays.

FLU-LIKE ILLNESS ACTIVITY AS OF NOVEMBER 29, 2011

At this point in the season, the overall national flu-like illness activity is "low moderate." This is consistent with last year's flu season pattern in that until now, we have had a slow steady rise in flu-like activity. As we proceed into the holiday season, the risk of spreading and catching flu and other upper respiratory infections increase as people gather together in enclosed spaces.

The pattern of higher flu-like activities is clearly low moderate in the states of Texas, Kentucky, Georgia and Louisiana. Other areas of increasing flu-like activity still center on certain northeastern states, states bordering the Great Lakes as well as West Virginia, Colorado, California, and Nevada.



For more information, please contact your local Health Risk Management Team.
