

# Respiratory and Cough Hygiene

## Printable learning resource

### What is this resource?

This resource is based on the e-learning module “NES: Respiratory and Cough Hygiene” from the **Scottish Infection Prevention and Control Education Pathway**.

The aim of this document is to make the e-learning content available to learners who

- do not have regular access to a computer and/or a network
- do not yet have the necessary IT skills or confidence to complete e-learning
- have different needs and therefore e-learning is not suitable for them.

All screen captures from the original module are included.

### How should this resource be used?

This resource can either be

- uploaded as a PDF file to tablets or other digital devices without internet access, or
- printed. (Printing in black and white is sufficient.)
  
- All navigational instructions on the screens in this document should be ignored.
  
- We have given instructions on how to complete interactivities and questions.
  
- A space has been provided for staff to make any additional notes after each topic.

### Internet access

Internet access is required for the following:

**Online feedback form and web links** for additional resources. Staff should be enabled to use web links and complete the feedback form if at all possible.

**Online assessment.** The online version of this resource consists of the e-learning module and a separate online assessment, and staff should be enabled and encouraged to complete this online assessment locally.

# Respiratory and cough hygiene

Coughs and sneezes spread diseases! Catch it, Bin it, Kill it!



[Learn how to navigate this module.](#)

Start

## Aim and learning outcomes

The **aim** of this module is to help you minimise the spread of respiratory infection from coughing and sneezing.

After completing this module, **you will be able to:**

- describe respiratory and cough hygiene
- identify how far respiratory secretions from coughing and sneezing can travel
- contain the spread of respiratory secretions from coughing and sneezing by using the correct techniques
- support and promote respiratory and cough hygiene in your workplace.



## Overview

This short module is for **all** staff who work in health and social care settings, no matter if you provide hands on care or not.

Once you have visited **all of the screens** in this module, you will be able to access the separate assessment. You will need to pass this assessment with an **80% pass mark** in order to get a certificate of completion.



This module will take you about **10-15 minutes** to complete.

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## What is respiratory and cough hygiene?

Respiratory and cough hygiene are actions that we take to **contain respiratory secretions** from coughing and sneezing in order to **minimise the risk** of spreading **respiratory infections**, such as common colds and flu.

The aim of good respiratory and cough hygiene is to prevent the transmission of respiratory infections like coughs and colds, but also the kinds of bacteria which may cause more severe illnesses such as pneumonia and tuberculosis. Viruses such as measles and chickenpox are also transmitted through respiratory secretions. The most common mode of transmission is via the aerosols and droplets that leave the body when we cough and sneeze.

They can also spread via a more indirect route such as hand and surface contact. Sneezing is a way in which our body tries to get rid of any harmful microbes and dust that we may have inhaled into our nose by using the mouth, lungs, and chest to blow the irritation away. Coughing is the same reflex action used by the body to clear the lungs and throat. When we cough or sneeze millions of viral or bacterial particles rush out and contaminate the surfaces on which they land, which could include our food and our hands.

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## How far do respiratory secretions travel when you sneeze?

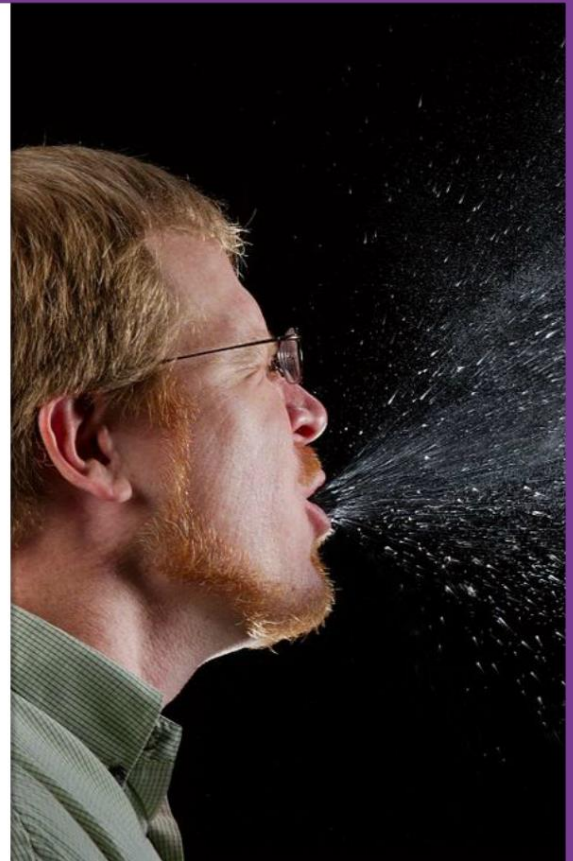


Below is a person sneezing in an office. How far do you think the respiratory secretions from the sneeze can travel?



Select the **maximum** distance you think respiratory secretions from sneezing can travel:

- 1 metre
- 2 metres
- 3 metres
- 4 metres
- 5 metres +



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Please try to answer the question above and then check the answer and the feedback on the following page.

## How far do respiratory secretions travel when you sneeze?



Below is a person sneezing in an office. How far do you think the respiratory secretions from the sneeze can travel?



Select the **maximum** distance you think respiratory secretions from sneezing can travel:

- 1 metre
- 2 metres
- 3 metres
- 4 metres
- 5 metres +



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## Correct



**That's correct.**

New research shows that respiratory secretions from sneezing can travel even farther than we once thought. They can reach people and objects **5 metres away and sometimes even farther!**



Respiratory secretions from coughing can reach around 2 metres.



[Continue >](#)

[SUBMIT](#)

## Stop respiratory infections spreading

There are **actions** you can take to **minimise the risk** of spreading **respiratory infections** in all care settings.



Watch the video to find out what these actions are:



If you can't view or hear the sound in the video, please view the [video script](#). Download [Stop respiratory infections spreading](#) for the key points of the video.

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## Respiratory hygiene part 2 transcript

Using a disposable tissue to cover the nose and mouth in order to trap these harmful microbes, and then disposing of the tissue in the correct bin minimises the risk of transmission. Hand hygiene must be carried out after wiping and blowing the nose, or trapping sneezes and coughs as the virus will remain on the hands and can spread quickly via touch.

The individuals you care for may need assistance to trap these harmful microbes and carry out hand hygiene. Disposable tissues are much more hygienic than cotton handkerchiefs. Tissues should be readily accessible and everyone should be encouraged to use it only once before throwing it away immediately then carrying out hand hygiene. On any occasions when there is not a tissue available, you should cough or sneeze into the crux of your elbow, this is sometimes referred to as giving your cough the elbow.

Remember, use a disposable tissue to trap your sneeze or cough. Discard disposable tissues immediately after use. Carry out hand hygiene. Encourage and assist others with the adoption of good respiratory hygiene practices. Ensure those you care for also carry out hand hygiene. Keep contaminated hands away from the mucous membranes of the eyes and nose.



# Stop respiratory infections spreading

To **minimise the risk** of spreading **respiratory infections** such as colds and flu in all care settings, remember the following:

- ✓ use a disposable tissue to trap your sneeze or cough
- ✓ discard disposable tissues immediately after use
- ✓ carry out hand hygiene
- ✓ encourage and assist others with the adoption of good respiratory hygiene practices
- ✓ ensure those you care for also carry out hand hygiene
- ✓ keep contaminated hands away from the mucous membranes of the eyes and nose.



## Being vigilant



Consider for a moment how you would feel if you spread respiratory infections to:

- people you care for
- work colleagues
- your family.

You need to be particularly vigilant in protecting those most at risk of developing complications such as:

- young children under 5 years old
- people aged 65 years and older
- pregnant women
- people aged 6 months to 65 years with chronic diseases.



On the following screens, you will have an opportunity to test your understanding of respiratory and cough hygiene. Select **NEXT** to continue.



## You don't have a tissue!



You are about to cough or sneeze, but do not have a disposable tissue available. What should you do?



Select the **most hygienic** option:

Use your hands

Use your elbow or upper arm

Don't use anything – wait until you can get a disposable tissue



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Please try to answer the question above and then check the answer and the feedback on the following page.

# You don't have a tissue!



You are about to cough or sneeze, but do not have a disposable tissue available. What should you do?



Select the **most hygienic** option:

Use your hands

Use your elbow or upper arm

Don't use anything – wait until you can get a disposable tissue



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## Correct



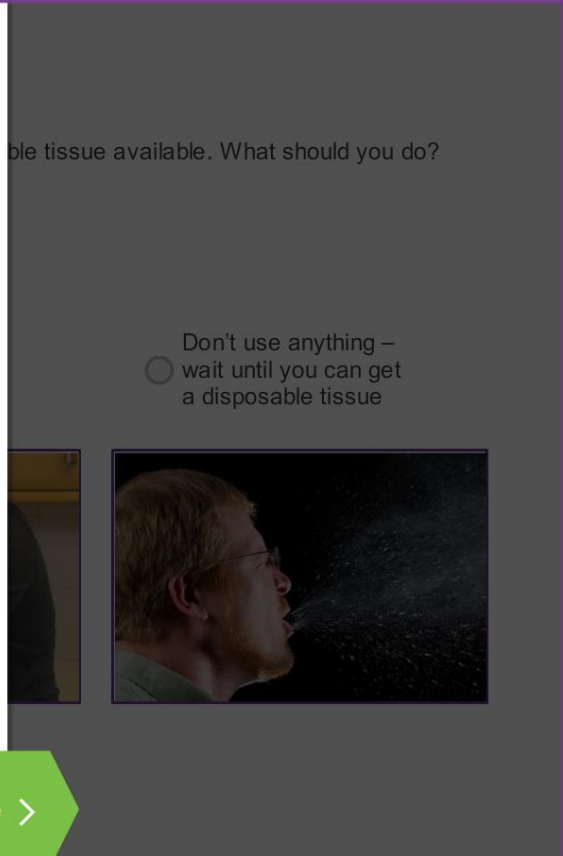
**That's correct.**

If you do not have any disposable tissues available, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm, instead of your hands or into the air. This does not completely block the spread of respiratory secretions but it can stop how far they travel.

**Always have a supply of disposable tissues to hand.**



If you cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm, the area may be a possible source of contamination. You will need to wash your elbow or upper arm, or the item of clothing that you are wearing.



Continue >

SUBMIT

## You cough or sneeze into your tissue



You cough or sneeze into your **disposable tissue**. Do you still need to wash your hands afterwards?



Select **either option** below:

Yes

No



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Please try to answer the question above and then check the answer and the feedback on the following page.

## You cough or sneeze into your tissue



You cough or sneeze into your **disposable tissue**. Do you still need to wash your hands afterwards?



Select **either option** below:

Yes

No



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## Correct



**That's correct.**

When you cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue, respiratory secretions can pass straight through the tissue and onto your hands.

You need to perform hand hygiene after coughing, sneezing, wiping or blowing your nose using disposable tissues, or after contact with respiratory secretions or objects contaminated by these secretions.



Do not use cloth handkerchiefs instead of disposable tissues. We typically reuse cloth handkerchiefs, which are contaminated, further spreading micro-organisms around.



[Continue >](#)

[SUBMIT](#)

## Lisa doesn't have a tissue!



Lisa is a nurse in the hospital. While caring for a person, she sneezes into her hands. There is a sink nearby with non-antimicrobial liquid soap and warm water, but it would be quicker for her to use the hand wipes by the bed. What should she do?



Select the **best** option that applies:

- Wash her hands with the non-antimicrobial liquid soap and warm water
- Use the hand wipes, continue her care, and then wash her hands later



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Please try to answer the question above and then check the answer and the feedback on the following page.

# Lisa doesn't have a tissue!



Lisa is a nurse in the hospital. While caring for a person, she sneezes into her hands. There is a sink nearby with non-antimicrobial liquid soap and warm water, but it would be quicker for her to use the hand wipes by the bed. What should she do?



Select the **best** option that applies:

- Wash her hands with the non-antimicrobial liquid soap and warm water
- Use the hand wipes, continue her care, and then wash her hands later



[< PREV](#) [SUBMIT](#)

## Correct



**That's correct.**

Lisa **should not** use hand wipes to perform hand hygiene while providing care **unless there is no** running **warm water available**.



If there is no running warm water available and you use hand wipes, make sure you use Alcohol Based Hand Rub after wiping your hands. Wash your hands at the first available opportunity.

sneezes into her hands. There is a sink  
it would be quicker for her to use the hand

the hand wipes, continue her care, and  
wash her hands later



Continue >

[SUBMIT](#)

## Assisting others



Robert is a care assistant and looks after people with **restricted mobility**. How could he help them follow respiratory and cough hygiene when they cough, sneeze, wipe or blow their noses?



Select **ALL** options that apply:

- Make sure they have disposable tissues and they can reach them.
- Make sure there is a table within their reach to put used tissues on it.
- Help them wash their hands with non-antimicrobial liquid soap and warm water.
- Make sure there is a receptacle for them to put used tissues in.



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Please try to answer the question above and then check the answer and the feedback on the following page.



## Assisting others



Robert is a care assistant and looks after people with **restricted mobility**. How could he help them follow respiratory and cough hygiene when they cough, sneeze, wipe or blow their noses?



Select **ALL** options that apply:

- Make sure they have disposable tissues and they can reach them.
- Make sure there is a table within their reach to put used tissues on it.
- Help them wash their hands with non-antimicrobial liquid soap and warm water.
- Make sure there is a receptacle for them to put used tissues in.



< PREV SUBMIT

## Correct



**That's correct.** All of the options you selected apply.

Robert should not provide a table within their reach to put used tissues on. The table will become contaminated and may then be touched by other people.



Be vigilant of helping other people who may need your assistance with respiratory and cough hygiene such as the elderly, those with a chronic illness and young children.



Continue >

SUBMIT

## Do's and don'ts

Try this activity to test your understanding of the actions you need to perform to minimise the spread of respiratory secretions.



Specify whether or not you should do or not do something by dragging and dropping the action into the appropriate column. Let's start with 'carry disposable tissues at all times'.

Carry disposable tissues at all times

Do's

Don'ts

[< PREV](#) [NEXT >](#)

Please fill in the boxes with the correct items and then check the answer and the feedback on the following page.

Here are the items:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Carry disposable tissues at all times   | Use cloth handkerchiefs   |
| Use hand wipes where there is running water available.                          | Sneeze or cough directly into your hands  |
| Put your used tissues promptly into a waste bin                                 | Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth if you have not washed them since coming into contact with respiratory secretions |
| Put used tissues in your pocket or on surfaces which are then touched by others | If you provide care, help the people you care for with respiratory and cough hygiene  |

## Do's and don'ts

Try this activity to test your understanding of the actions you need to perform to minimise the spread of respiratory secretions.

**Correct**



That's correct.

Well done!

**Do's**

- Carry disposable tissues at all times
- Put your used tissues promptly into a waste bin
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth if you have not washed them since coming into contact with respiratory secretions
- If you provide care, help the people you care for with respiratory and cough hygiene

**Don'ts**

- Use hand wipes where there is running water available.
- Put used tissues in your pocket or on surfaces which are then touched by others
- Use cloth handkerchiefs
- Sneeze or cough directly into your hands

NEXT >

## Summary

To minimise the spread of respiratory secretions, remember:

- Cover the nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing the nose
- Dispose of all used tissues promptly into a waste bin
- Wash hands immediately with non-antimicrobial liquid soap and warm water after coughing, sneezing, using tissues, or after contact with respiratory secretions or objects contaminated by these secretions
- Do not use hand wipes in care settings to perform hand hygiene unless there is no running water available
- Keep contaminated hands away from the eyes, nose and mouth.



Select **NEXT** to learn what you can practically do to get started.

**Coughs and sneezes spread diseases**

always carry tissues | cover your coughs and sneezes | throw used tissues in a bin | always clean your hands

**Stop germs spreading**

**CATCH IT**  
Germs spread easily. Always carry tissues and use them to catch your cough or sneeze.

**BIN IT**  
Germs can live for several hours on tissues. Dispose of your tissue as soon as possible.

**KILL IT**  
Hands can transfer germs to every surface you touch. Clean your hands as soon as you can.

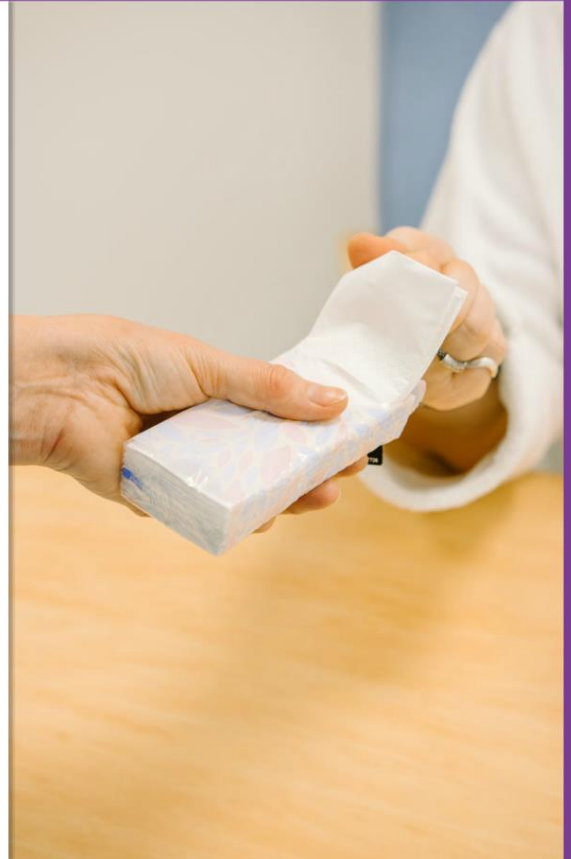
NHS

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## Next steps

Here are some examples of what you could do to get started:

1. Make sure there is a good supply of disposable tissues and hand hygiene products in your workplace
2. Keep your working environment clean
3. Help people who cannot help themselves especially to wash their hands
4. Do not come into work if you are feeling unwell with the cold or flu.



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### Notes for Topic 1: Respiratory and cough hygiene

## Feedback and assessment

Before you complete this module, we would really appreciate your feedback on this online module - you can access the online feedback form using the following link:

[Respiratory and cough hygiene - Feedback Questionnaire.](#)

You are now required to complete an assessment.

Now that you have completed this module, please complete the assessment. The pass mark for the assessment is **80%**.



Select the info buttons below for more information.



Please close this browser window to exit the module and then open the assessment.

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<https://response.questback.com/nhseducationforscotland/sipcep03bcoughhygiene/>

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### Alternative formats



This resource may be made available, in full or in summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact NHS Education for Scotland on 0131 656 3200 or email [altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk) to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

Transcriptions of any videos within this resource are available on request.



Please close this browser window to exit the module and then open the assessment.

## Printable learning resource – Completion Record

Learning outcomes:

- describe respiratory and cough hygiene
- identify how far respiratory secretions from coughing and sneezing can travel
- contain the spread of respiratory secretions from coughing and sneezing by using the correct techniques
- support and promote respiratory and cough hygiene in your workplace.

Anticipated learning time: 10-15 minutes

I confirm that I have completed the above module.

Learner name: .....

Learner role and location: .....

Learner signature .....



**Scottish Infection  
Prevention and Control  
Education Pathway**

*A route to excellence*

This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on **0131 656 3200** or email **altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk** to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.



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