

Benefits News

Get to know your benefits

December 2023



IT'S THE SEASON FOR SNIFFLES AND COLDS

It's the time of year when respiratory illnesses (such as colds, flu, RSV, and COVID-19) spread more easily. In this edition, learn how to better protect yourself and your family. But how clean is clean? And is a flu shot right for you?

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Reminder: Review your 2024 Benefit Summary for errors

Open Enrollment is over, but there is one more step to complete the process. Log into [PEBBenroll.com](https://pebbenroll.com). Under **Resource Tools**, click **My Benefit Statement** to check your benefit selections.

If you find an error, notify PEBB Member Services by Feb. 29, 2024 at 503-373-1102 or pebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov.

Note: The deadline for Health Care and Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) corrections has already passed. You can only make changes to your FSAs if you have a [Qualified Status Change \(QSC\)](#).

Cleaning, sanitizing, or disinfecting: Which one is best?

With common winter viruses around us, it's important to keep our hands and high-touch surfaces clean. But how clean?

Avoid the urge to overclean. The more you tidy up, the more you expose yourself and family to the chemicals in cleaning products.



| | CLEANING | SANITIZING | DISINFECTING |
|----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Typical Uses | <p>Most things Clothes, floors, walls, windows</p> | <p>Items that may touch your mouth (or your child's or pet's) Utensils, dishes, toys</p> | <p>“High-touch” items that won't be put in a mouth Door knobs, light switches, cell phones</p> <p>Items in contact with “potty” germs Toilet handles, changing tables</p> |
| Common Products | <p>Soap, detergent, or baking soda with warm water; vinegar</p> | <p>Soap or detergent with very hot water or steam</p> <p>Note: Hand-sanitizers should not be used on things that may end up in a mouth</p> | <p>Bleach, rubbing alcohol, products specifically labeled “disinfectant”</p> |
| What Does It Do to Germs? | <p>Reduces germs to an acceptable level</p> | <p>Reduces germs to generally safe levels when used according to product label</p> | <p>Kills most germs when used according to product label</p> |

Sources: CDC, 2023; Consumer Reports, 2020; Medline Plus, 2020.



How safe are cleaning products?

The truth is, most household cleaning products are relatively safe when used as directed. However, when used improperly, some can have health risks.

Here are common household cleaning products and potential side effects.

Tackling dirt and debris

Simple cleaning products (and some elbow grease) are best for the job.

Even if you decide to sanitize or disinfect a surface, you'll get better results if you remove the dirt and debris first.



CLEANERS

USE WITH CAUTION

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| All-purpose cleaners | Can irritate your skin, eyes, nose, and throat. Can be poisonous if swallowed. |
| Dishwashing detergent | May cause nausea, skin irritations or burns. Poisonous if swallowed. |
| Glass cleaner | May make you sleepy, fall unconscious, or cause death. |
| Laundry detergent | Can irritate your skin and set off asthma. If swallowed, can cause nausea, vomiting, shock, convulsions, or coma. |
| Oven cleaners | Can seriously burn your skin and eyes. Fatal if swallowed. |



SANITIZERS

USE WITH CAUTION

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Hand sanitizer | Can be poisonous if swallowed. |
| Antibacterial soap | Can irritate your skin and weaken your immune system. |
| Other antibacterial products | Can irritate your eyes and burn your skin and throat. |



DISINFECTANTS

USE WITH CAUTION

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Bleach | Can irritate your skin, eyes, nose, throat, and stomach. Should always be diluted with water before use. |
| Rubbing alcohol | Can dry out and irritate your skin. Can be fatal if swallowed. |
| Other disinfecting products | Can irritate your skin, eyes, lungs, and throat. Can be poisonous if swallowed. |



Important!

No matter which product you use, it's a good idea to wear gloves and goggles. Be sure to open a window.



6

facts about household cleaners

Here are some key things to know about common home cleaning products:

1

KEEPING SOME GERMS AROUND IS HEALTHY. Our bodies need to be exposed to a safe level of germs to keep our immune systems strong. Limit the use of disinfectants and sanitizers.

2

NOT ALL CLEANING WIPES CONTAIN DISINFECTANTS. Some wipes are antibacterial, which only kill bacteria. Look for “disinfecting” on the label for the ones that kill viruses too.

3

YOU SHOULDN'T USE DISINFECTING WIPES ON TOYS AND FOOD. The chemicals in disinfecting wipes shouldn't come in contact with your mouth. Same with your children's and pets' mouths.

4

DISINFECTANTS NEED TO STAY WET ON A SURFACE FOR A WHILE TO KILL GERMS. To work properly, disinfectants should be left wet on a surface for awhile. Read the product label for details.

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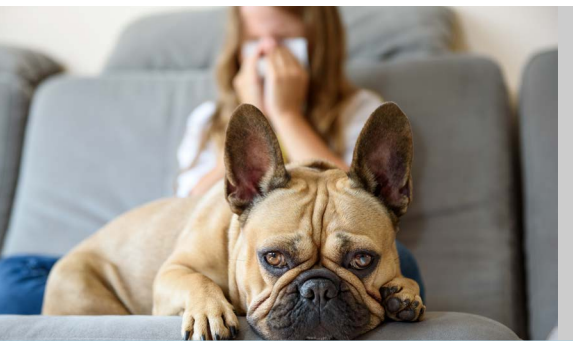
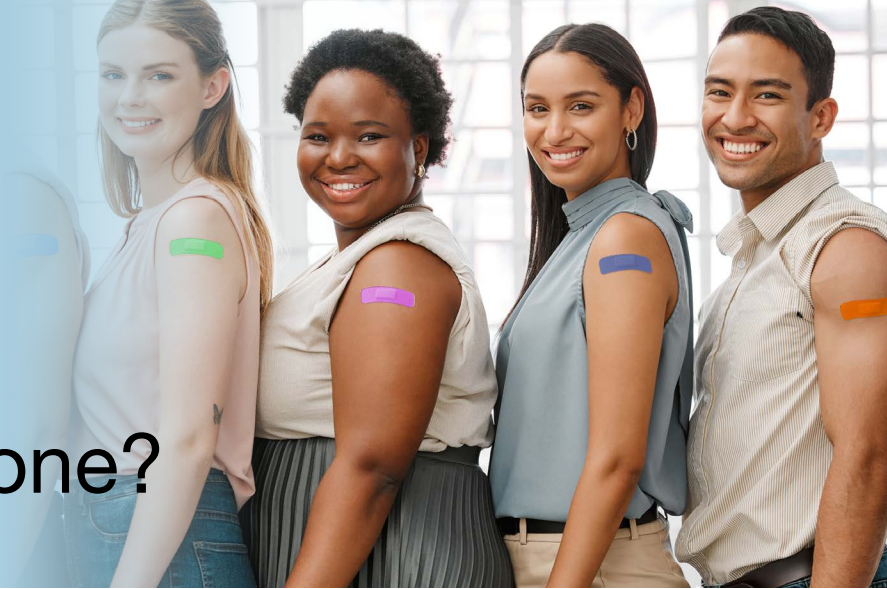
IT'S NEVER OKAY TO MIX CLEANING PRODUCTS. When combined, some cleaning products (even homemade ones) can give off harmful fumes or explode!

6

CHOOSE SAFER CLEANERS. “Environmentally safe” or “green” on the label doesn't mean it's risk-free. Learn about the EPA's [“Safer Choice” certification](#) for products and chemicals.



Flu vaccine: Should you get one?



Flu virus and vaccine facts

- Each year, roughly 500,000 Americans go to the hospital because of the flu.
- Between 30,000 and 60,000 people die in the U.S. each year because of the flu.
- Flu viruses change quickly, so you need to get a flu vaccine every year.
- You can't get the flu from a flu vaccine.

Want to avoid getting the flu and spreading it to others this season? Do your part to protect yourself and those around you. When more people get a flu shot, fewer people get sick with the flu. Most people recover from the flu without problems, but the flu can be deadly. It can lead to serious health problems such as pneumonia. Or it can make an existing disease worse.

Every year, thousands of people end up in the hospital with health problems resulting from the flu. The flu shot helps ease the burden on the health care system—and you!

A flu vaccine may not always keep you from getting the seasonal flu. But it can make the symptoms milder and lower the risk of flu-related health problems.

A few people may not be able to get a flu vaccine. You might steer clear if you:

- Have a severe allergy to any part of the vaccine
- Had a serious reaction to the vaccine in the past
- Had Guillain-Barré syndrome
- Are currently ill



The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone age 6 months and older get a flu vaccine. But it's most important to get one if you're at high risk for other health problems that can result from the flu. Those at high risk include:

- Young children
- People who are pregnant
- Older adults
- People who have chronic diseases or weak immune systems

If you're taking care of someone who is at high risk, it's a good idea to get a flu vaccine. This can lower the chance that you could spread the flu to the person you're caring for.

Sources: Kaiser Permanente, 2023; Moda, 2023.



Flu shots are offered at no cost to you

When you get a flu shot from an in-network provider/pharmacy, it's 100% covered by your PEBB medical plan. If you have an upcoming appointment with your primary care provider, get your shot there. Otherwise, check with your medical plan vendor to locate an in-network pharmacy near you:

- [Kaiser Permanente](#)
- [Moda Health](#)
- [Providence Health Plan](#)

Simple ways to boost your immune system

With cold and flu season here, is your immune system ready? Your body's immune system helps fight off bacteria and viruses. Here are five simple ways you can boost your body's ability to ward off illnesses.



Eat healthy foods

Add fruit and vegetables to your diet. Try olive oil, salmon, and chia seeds. Eat yogurt, sauerkraut, and kimchi to improve your gut health.



Exercise daily

Aim for about 60 minutes of moderate exercise each day.



Get enough sleep

Make sure to get 7-8 hours of sleep every night.



Reduce stress

Say no when you don't have time to take on a new project. Try meditation, exercise, and yoga to lower your stress levels.



Laugh more

Find ways to laugh, which reduces stress. It also boosts white blood cells, which help your body fight infection.



Wash those hands

Make things easier on your immune system by washing your hands throughout the day. Lather up and scrub with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Do this before and/or after things like handling food, using the toilet, blowing your nose, or caring for an ill family member.

PEBB at your service



“PEBB is doing an amazing job already. I’m excited to learn more about the details, strategies, and current plans. I want to see how I can best support plans for Oregon government workers and their families.”

Get to know: Emily Wang

Emily Wang is PEBB’s newest Board member. She is a second-generation Taiwanese American. She also married into her Nez Perce/Umatilla family in the 1990s. Emily was born and raised in Carbondale, Illinois. From a young age, Emily’s family experiences sparked a passion: health care for all. These experiences include her:

- Father-in-law who was not allowed to speak his language, nor follow his cultural traditions and practices at an Indian boarding school.
- Mother who struggled to communicate with medical staff due to a language barrier.

Emily received a bachelor’s degree in biology/pre-medicine at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Later, she earned a master’s degree in public health and community health education. She is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in mental health. This degree is for culturally specific youth and families.

Emily’s career includes experience in public health and health care access. It also includes influencing research and public policy. For example, she served as the health policy and program coordinator for the City of Minneapolis. “I learned a lot about politics in that role. I worked closely with people representing the mayor, city council, government, K-12 public school health services, and communities impacted by health inequities” she says.

She also served as the first Asian American health coordinator at the Minnesota Department of Health. “At the time, I was working in one of only two states in the country working on eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities.”

Emily has worked with unions, employee resource groups, and communities of color. She has also worked with rural and urban Indian populations. “I’ve always been interested in different cultures and racial ethnic groups’ health experiences.” For the past 12 years, she has been a proud union member in Oregon.

She currently serves as a health equity policy analyst for Oregon Health Authority and on the Equity and Inclusion Division’s legislative team. Lastly, she leads OHA’s Cultural Competence Continuing Education program for health care professionals.

Emily cares about advancing health equity for all. She previously served on the PEBB Member Advisory Committee and on was impressed by their focus on equity. Recently, she was recruited by the union for the PEBB Board. “PEBB is doing an amazing job already. I’m excited to learn more about the details, strategies, and current plans. I want to see how I can best support plans for Oregon government workers and their families,” she says. As a Board member, her priorities are to:

- **Promote health, safety, work-life balance, connection and community, and general wellbeing.** This applies in the workplace and at home.
- **Make health care easier for members to understand.**
- **Ensure policy and decision makers understand that all members are people of Oregon.** This includes union members, all state government workers, and their families.
- **Keep costs down** while still providing the best possible benefits for all members.
- **Think outside the box** regarding health and access to health care.
- **Promote alternative health and healing practices** for those who value it. This includes equine (horse) therapy, acupuncture, and more.

In her free time, Emily volunteers with the union and participates in volleyball, Zumba, Chicago-style steppin’, dragon boat racing, and pickleball. She also enjoys music and theater events and exploring the outdoors.

PEBB Board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month and are open to the public. To learn more about upcoming meetings or to view recordings of past meetings, visit the [Public Meetings](#) page of the PEBB website.

Benefits Questions?

Email: pebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov

Phone: 503-373-1102

