

# 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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## Your best defense against most colds? Handwashing!

Frequent handwashing is one of the easiest ways to protect your health. Be sure that you (and all your family members) wash hands before and/or after things like handling food, using the toilet, blowing your nose or caring for an ill family member.

Soap and warm water (with plenty of lather and at least 20 seconds of scrubbing) is great for handwashing. If you don't have access to them, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



# 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.



	<b>CLEANING</b>	<b>SANITIZING</b>	<b>DISINFECTING</b>
<b>Typical Uses</b>	<p><b>Most things</b> Clothes, floors, walls, windows</p>	<p><b>Items that may touch your mouth (or your child's or pet's)</b> Utensils, dishes, toys</p>	<p><b>“High-touch” items that won’t be put in a mouth</b> Door knobs, light switches, cell phones</p> <p><b>Items in contact with “potty” germs</b> Toilet handles, changing tables</p>
<b>Common Products</b>	<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>
<b>What Does It Do to Germs?</b>	<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

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



## SANITIZERS

### USE WITH CAUTION

<b>Hand sanitizer</b>	Can be poisonous if swallowed.
<b>Antibacterial soap</b>	Can irritate your skin and weaken your immune system.
<b>Other antibacterial products</b>	Can irritate your eyes and burn your skin and throat.



## DISINFECTANTS

### USE WITH CAUTION

<b>Bleach</b>	Can irritate your skin, eyes, nose, throat, and stomach. Should always be diluted with water before use.
<b>Rubbing alcohol</b>	Can dry out and irritate your skin. Can be fatal if swallowed.
<b>Other disinfecting products</b>	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.

5

**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.

**GET**  
your  
**FLU SHOT**



### **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 OEBC 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

# 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.



# OEBB at your service



**“[Our staff] are on the front line, serving children, and they need to know they have care if they’re injured or get sick.”**

## **Get to know: Dr. Sue Rieke-Smith**

Sue Rieke-Smith, Ed.D. was born in Oregon City and is an OEBB Board member. Growing up, her family moved to various cities across the Midwest and Pacific Northwest due to her father’s career in medicine. She learned a lot about the medical system by listening to her dad. Eventually, she followed in his footsteps, working as a trauma nurse and a public health nurse.

Known as “Dr. Sue,” she has served on the OEBB Board for over five years. She values the diverse backgrounds and expertise of fellow Board members. “We have physicians, actuaries, education representatives, and classified individuals. We also have representatives from county and city municipalities as well as rural partners on the Board.” These diverse perspectives help the Board serve the unique needs of each population. For example, the Board members ask themselves, “If something works in the valley, will that work out in rural areas as well?” That’s a fair question to ask when the travel time to providers and hospitals is often longer for members outside major cities.

As a Board member, Dr. Sue’s priorities are:

- **Finding new ways to improve the quality of health care while managing costs.** In fact, she thinks OEBB can be a model for balancing excellent care and keeping the plans affordable. “Our staff deserves that. They’re on the front line, serving children, and they need to know they have care if they’re injured or get sick,” she says. Dr. Sue also participates in the Strategies on Evidence and Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) to stay on top of the latest trends.

**“I want to learn more about [the technical information] and how it makes a difference for people on the ground.”**

- **Ensuring the level and quality of health care is the same for all members.**
- **Making sure members have the mental health resources they need.** This applies whether members live in cities or more rural areas. Dr. Sue understands the importance of members having easy access to mental health professionals, programs, and resources.

Dr. Sue’s nursing background helps her bring a unique perspective to the Board because she understands delivering care and the costs associated with care. Even so, she feels like she has much more to learn on the Board. “The sheer volume of [technical] information can be overwhelming,” she says. Dr. Sue is grateful for other Board members and Mercer colleagues who have the knowledge to get deeper into the details. “I want to learn more about it and how it makes a difference for people on the ground,” she says.

In her spare time, Dr. Sue enjoys reading, cooking, and gardening. She and her husband have three grandchildren and look forward to spending time with their family and faith community.

OEBB Board meetings are held on the first 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 OEBB website.

## **Benefits Questions?**

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