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## Spread joy, not germs: stay healthy this holiday season

EDMONTON – 'tis the season of celebratory gatherings, and – unfortunately – the spread of seasonal illness. With both respiratory and gastrointestinal illness already impacting communities around Edmonton, Alberta Health Services (AHS) is reminding all Albertans of routine precautions to protect health and prevent illness in the days and weeks ahead.

**Get immunized:** Immunization is the single most effective means of protecting yourself against influenza viruses already circulating in our communities. It's not too late to be immunized. Vaccine continues to be offered to all Albertans (six months of age and older), free of charge. Remember: it takes up to two weeks after receiving your influenza immunization to be protected against influenza, so make plans to get your vaccine today! For more information, including local clinic schedules, visit [www.albertahealthservices.ca/influenza](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/influenza) or call Health Link Alberta at 1.866.408.5465.

**Cover your cough:** Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing. If you don't have a tissue, always cough or sneeze into your arm, not into your hands. Throw away tissues after wiping your nose or covering a cough, and wash your hands.

**Clean your hands:** Using soap and warm water, wash your hands thoroughly and often, including after coughing, sneezing, using tissues or the washroom, and before eating or preparing foods. Alcohol-based hand rub or sanitizer can also be helpful if hands are not visibly soiled. Make a point of keeping hands and fingers away from your eyes, nose and mouth.

**Stay home when sick:** If you have symptoms of illness, including fever, cough, diarrhea and/or vomiting, stay home from work, school, daycare, or any social function. Please also refrain from visiting family, friends or loved ones in hospitals, care facilities or seniors lodges, until you have fully recovered.

**Mind your food prep:** Always keep safe food handling practices top of mind when cooking and serving up your holiday feasts. If tackling the turkey task, follow the simple tips available at [www.albertahealthservices.ca/turkeytips](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/turkeytips). And remember: if you are sick, do not prepare food for anyone, until fully recovered.

**Host a healthy house:** Keep household surfaces clean, regularly using a household cleaner (follow directions on the product label). Think creatively when hosting gatherings: put a bow on a hand sanitizer pump and leave it out for guests to use; choose pre-wrapped candies or single serve food items instead of offering bowls of unwrapped snacks to all. Always thank others for declining invites due to illness.

**Year 'round:** in addition to the above, keep yourself in good health by covering the basics: get enough rest, try to eat a balanced diet including at least five daily servings of fruit and vegetables, and exercise regularly. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation and do not ever drink and drive.

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Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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**For media inquiries, contact:**

Christi Retson-Spalding  
AHS Communications  
(780) 860-3629