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from Judee,
Our Parish Nurse ♥

GermS in the School Room

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WebMD Feature

Young children catch about eight colds a year. Combined, they lose nearly 22 million school days due to the common cold alone. With so many children in one place and sharing supplies, it's no wonder that the classroom can be a breeding ground for the germs that cause colds and flu. Odds are your child will be bringing home more than homework this school year.

Even teachers say more needs to be done to make our classrooms cleaner and healthier for children. A whopping 92% of teachers say that regular disinfecting in classrooms can result in fewer absences caused by illness and 96% of them believe more can be done to make classrooms cleaner and healthier places for our children, according to a survey presented at a news briefing by the American Medical Association.

Here are 10 tips to stop germs at school:

Wash your hands frequently throughout the day.

Use warm, soapy water and rub vigorously for at least 20 seconds -- about the amount of time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice, suggests Paul Horowitz, MD, the medical director of pediatric clinics at Legacy Health System in Portland, Ore. "We can't stress this enough when it comes to keeping colds and flu away," he says. "Avoid eating or touching your eyes, nose, and mouth without washing your hands first."

Verify the hand-washing policy of staff.

For many families, daycare is essential. When choosing a facility, be sure to check into the daycare facility's hand-washing policy, the actual hand-washing practices, and the availability of sinks, says Neil Schachter, MD, medical director of respiratory care at Mount Sinai in New York City, and the author of *The Good Doctor's Guide to Colds and Flu*. It really works. Research out of Purdue University Calumet in Hammond, Ind., found that instructional programs on germs and hand washing in childcare centers reduced the spread of infectious diseases during peak cold and flu season.

Send your child equipped with mechanical pencils.

Studies have shown that the dirtiest thing in any classroom is the community pencil sharpener, says Charles Gerba, PhD, a professor of microbiology at University of Arizona in Tucson. "Pack mechanical pencils in your child's school supplies so he or she doesn't have to use it."

Wipe down common surfaces with disinfectant.

"In a school setting these include drinking fountain handles, water faucets in sinks, light switches, paper towel dispensers, handles, and doorknobs," says Horowitz. "Some of the surfaces are neglected and we don't appreciate what [germs] live on there and how long they can live," he says. Ask to make sure surfaces are being cleaned regularly. Research presented at a media briefing by the American Medical Association showed that nearly 50% of those teachers surveyed report they regularly clean and disinfect their classrooms themselves.

Carefully wipe down desks and keyboards.

Research done at the University of Arizona found that desk surfaces, computer keyboards, and computer mice ranked high in levels of five bacteria:

- *E. coli*
- *Klebsiella pneumonia*
- *Streptococcus*
- *Salmonella*
- *Staphylococcus aureus*

But when office workers were told to clean their desk with disinfecting wipes, bacterial levels were reduced by 99%. "Send your child to

