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## Infectious Diseases

**Also called:** Communicable diseases

### What are infectious diseases?

Germs, or microbes, are found everywhere - in the air, soil, and water. There are also germs on your skin and in your body. Many of them are harmless, and some can even be helpful. But some of them can make you sick. Infectious diseases are diseases that are caused by germs.

### What are the different types of germs that cause infectious diseases?

There are four main types of germs:

- **Bacteria** [<https://medlineplus.gov/bacterialinfections.html>] are one-celled germs that multiply quickly. They may give off toxins, which are harmful chemicals that can make you sick. Strep throat [<https://medlineplus.gov/streptococcalinfections.html>] and urinary tract infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/urinarytractinfections.html>] are common bacterial infections.
- **Viruses** [<https://medlineplus.gov/viralinfections.html>] are tiny capsules that contain genetic material. They invade your cells so that they can multiply. This can kill, damage, or change the cells and make you sick. Viral infections include HIV [<https://medlineplus.gov/hiv.html>] and the common cold [<https://medlineplus.gov/commoncold.html>] .
- **Fungi** [<https://medlineplus.gov/fungalinfections.html>] are primitive plant-like organisms such as mushrooms, mold, mildew, and yeasts. Athlete's foot [<https://medlineplus.gov/athletesfoot.html>] and yeast infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/yeastinfections.html>] are common fungal infections.
- **Parasites** [<https://medlineplus.gov/parasiticdiseases.html>] are animals or plants that survive by living on or in other living things. Malaria [<https://medlineplus.gov/malaria.html>] and head lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/headlice.html>] are infections that are caused by parasites.

### How can you get infectious diseases?

There are many different ways that you can get an infectious disease, depending on the type of germ. They can include:

- Through direct contact with a person who is sick. This includes kissing, touching, sneezing, coughing, and sexual contact. If you are pregnant [<https://medlineplus.gov/infectionsandpregnancy.html>] , you can pass some germs to your fetus.
- Through indirect contact, when you touch something that has germs on it. For example, you could get germs if someone who is sick touched a door handle, and then you touch it.
- Through insect [<https://medlineplus.gov/insectbitesandstings.html>] or animal [<https://medlineplus.gov/animalbites.html>] bites.
- Through contaminated food [<https://medlineplus.gov/foodborneillness.html>] , water, soil, or plants.

### What are the symptoms of infectious diseases?

Infectious diseases can cause many different symptoms. Some are so mild that you may not even notice any symptoms, while others can be life-threatening.

### What are the treatments for infectious diseases?

There are treatments for some infectious diseases, such as antibiotic [https://medlineplus.gov/antibiotics.html] , antiviral, antifungal and anti-parasitic medicines. But for other infections, such as some caused by viruses, you can only treat your symptoms while you wait for your immune system [https://medlineplus.gov/immunesystemanddisorders.html] to fight off the germ.

### Can infectious diseases be prevented?



You can take steps to help prevent many infectious diseases:

- Get vaccinated [https://medlineplus.gov/vaccines.html] .
- Wash your hands often [https://medlineplus.gov/germsandhygiene.html] .
- Pay attention to food safety [https://medlineplus.gov/foodsafety.html] .
- Avoid contact with wild animals.
- Use a latex condom every time you have sex. If your or your partner is allergic to latex [https://medlineplus.gov/latexallergy.html] , you can use polyurethane condoms.
- Don't share items such as toothbrushes, combs, and straws.


### Start Here

- Germs: Understand and Protect against Bacteria, Viruses, and Infections [https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/in-depth/germs/ART-20045289?p=1] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/in-depth/germs/art-20045289?p=1]
- Infectious Diseases [https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/symptoms-causes/syc-20351173?p=1] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/symptoms-causes/syc-20351173?p=1]

### Diagnosis and Tests

- PCR Tests [https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/pcr-tests]  (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-pcr/]
- Rapid Tests [https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/rapid-tests/]  (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-rapidas/]


### Prevention and Risk Factors

- Germs and Hygiene: MedlinePlus Health Topic [https://medlineplus.gov/germsandhygiene.html]  
 (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/germsandhygiene.html]

### Living With

- Coping with Stress during Infectious Disease Outbreaks [https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma14-4885.pdf] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) - **PDF**
- Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health: Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation during an Infectious Disease Outbreak [https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/PEP20-01-01-007\_2.pdf] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) - **PDF**

### Related Issues


- About Port Health [https://www.cdc.gov/port-health/about/] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Antibiotic Resistance: MedlinePlus Health Topic [https://medlineplus.gov/antibioticresistance.html]  
 (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/antibioticresistance.html]
- Bacterial vs. Viral Infections: How Do They Differ? [https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/expert-answers/infectious-disease/FAQ-20058098?p=1] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/expert-answers/infectious-disease/faq-20058098?p=1]

Recurrent Infections May Signal Immunodeficiencies [<https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public/conditions-library/immunodeficiency/recurrent-infections-immunodeficiencies>] (American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public/biblioteca-de-condiciones/biblioteca-de-inmunodeficiencias/la-recurrencia-de-infecciones-puede-indicar-inmuno>]

- What's the Difference Between Infectious and Contagious? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/contagious.html>] (Nemours Foundation)  
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/contagious.html>]

## Specifics

- Types of Neglected Tropical Diseases [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/research/neglected-tropical-diseases-types>]  (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases)

## Statistics and Research

- FastStats: Infectious Disease [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/infectious-disease.htm>] (National Center for Health Statistics)

## Clinical Trials


- ClinicalTrials.gov: Communicable Diseases [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Communicable+Diseases%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

## Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Public education during epidemics of infectious diseases: A national mixed-method study... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40748949>]
- Article: Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) factors and the incidence of communicable... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40743111>]
- Article: Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence for Infectious Disease Surveillance, Diagnosis, and... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40733500>]
- Infectious Diseases -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Communicable+Diseases%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+2+Years%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

## Find an Expert

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [<https://www.cdc.gov/>]  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/>]
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases [<https://www.nfid.org/>]
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/>] 

## Children

- Childhood Contagious Diseases [<https://skinsight.com/disease-groups/childhood-contagious-diseases/?lmiw9cAp>] (VisualDX)
- Overview of Infectious Diseases [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/infections/Pages/Overview-of-Infectious-Diseases.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/health-issues/conditions/infections/paginas/overview-of-infectious-diseases.aspx>]
- Repeated Infections in Children [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/repeated-infections-in-children/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)  
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/infecciones-reiteradas-en-los-ninos-es/?adfree=true>]



## MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

CSF cell count [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003625.htm>]

Latex agglutination test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003334.htm>]

## Related Health Topics

Antibiotic Resistance [<https://medlineplus.gov/antibioticresistance.html>]

Antibiotics [<https://medlineplus.gov/antibiotics.html>]

Bacterial Infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/bacterialinfections.html>]

Fungal Infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/fungalinfections.html>]

Infection Control [<https://medlineplus.gov/infectioncontrol.html>]

Parasitic Diseases [<https://medlineplus.gov/parasiticdiseases.html>]

Traveler's Health [<https://medlineplus.gov/travelershealth.html>]

Vaccines [<https://medlineplus.gov/vaccines.html>]

Viral Infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/viralinfections.html>]

## National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Infectious Diseases* is the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/>]

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