



The Sneeze

Think of a person who has a cold and sneezes in a crowded room without covering his or her face. Picture thousands of water droplets laden with mucus flying through the air. As the droplets disappear, laughter erupts because the sneeze was so loud. But where did the droplets go? Some are still in the air, and some land on food, on you and on your friends. How could you get a cold from these water droplets?

Reach Out and Touch Someone

Would you believe that most intestinal, stomach and cold viruses are spread by our hands? Through touch, microorganisms are transferred from the fluids in the nose and mouth of one person to something (e.g., a pencil, food, a phone) or to someone else. When other people bring their hands or the object near their mouths, the bacteria or viruses may find a new home.



A large, dark, textured metal bucket filled with water, with a metal cup resting inside it. The bucket is placed on a wooden surface, and the background shows a window with light coming through. The cup is a simple, shallow metal cup, and it is partially submerged in the water. The bucket has a handle on the right side.

The Common Cup

About 150 years ago, in one room schools, students dipped a common cup into a water bucket for a drink. Schools and most homes did not have running water, so once the bucket was filled, everyone drank from the same dipper. As people learned that a shared cup meant shared pathogens, states outlawed the common dipper. What role did water play in the spread of pathogens?