

20 surprising ways to prevent colds and flu



You've got to act fast to fight off colds and flu. Case in point: University of Arizona scientists have found that when someone is sick in an office, it takes only four hours (!) for surfaces like coffeepot handles, copy-machine buttons and the fridge door to

show traces of infectious virus.

Considering that the 2012 flu season was one of the worst on record, it's well worth arming yourself against aches, cough, fever and general misery. For reality-tested tips that actually work, we turned to doctors, politicians, makeup artists and other brave souls who are exposed to viruses every day. Steal their strategies to win the war against germs this winter.

Wipe out

"Gyms are crawling with sweaty towels, dirty sneakers and other germmy grossness. Instead of sitting directly on a mat or bench, I'll place a clean towel on it first. Any equipment that I have to touch—like free weights or bicycle handlebars— I'll clean first with antibacterial wipes."

—Franci Cohen, group-exercise instructor and owner of Fuel Fitness, in Brooklyn, N.Y.