

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army with today's Community Comment.

Back in the early 90's I read a book called The Hot Zone. It was all about the spread of Ebola and reading it left me with a psychological tic: I found myself washing my hands twenty or more times a day.

There was a great benefit to this minor obsession! It was December, I worked retail and came into contact with hundreds of people each shift, but that was the one winter that I didn't get a cold. Not even a sniffle.

The urgent need to wash my hands mostly ended after a few weeks. These days I probably only wash a few times a day more than a normal person. And I get sick every year.

Even though there are hundreds of viral strains which cause the so-called "common cold", it is the rhinoviruses that particularly love to set up camp in their human hosts. They are by far the most infectious diseases human beings are susceptible to and they generally leave even the healthiest and most active among us feeling dull, sluggish, and miserable.

Things which increase your chance of getting a cold include being around other people, stress, and lack of sleep. In short, being a part of the Christmas season. Cures include... Well, there is no cure. In fact, people demanding antibiotic treatments for their colds is one of the contributing factors to the rise of aptly-named superbugs which will probably turn into a pandemic that ends humankind someday. Since we don't really want that happening any time soon, we need to be better about not sharing any colds we get with those around us.

If the impending doom of humanity isn't enough to inspire you to sneeze responsibly, consider the economic cost. Americans spend between eight and ten Billion dollars on medical visits due to colds each year. We throw another three and a half Billion dollars at our symptoms through over the counter and prescription drugs, but still lose 150 million workdays because of our own colds and another 126 million to staying home for our kids' colds. We may call it common, but there's nothing common about the astronomical costs of catching a cold.

So what can you do to keep from sharing your cold with those around you? That's an excellent question!

Ideally, at the first sign of a cold you would quarantine yourself for two weeks – no human contact and lots of disinfectant. Since that seems a little extreme to most people, how about we start by trying to keep our viruses to ourselves. When you cough or sneeze a cloud of

mucus and saliva spews out of you. This summer, researchers at MIT established that the viral-laden aerosol of bodily fluids expelled by your sneeze can go up to 200 feet and stays afloat over ten minutes.

So cover your cough! Use a handkerchief, a tissue, the crook of your elbow, or even your hands if you must, but clamp that spray down.

Also, wash your hands frequently, especially after coming into contact with anything that might have been touched by other people, like money, food, or other people. Wash first, then use hand sanitizer.

This is for your benefit and that of others. Because Christmas may be the season of giving, but I don't want you to give me your cold. And neither does anyone else.

This has been Lt. Roger McCort for today's KINS Community Comment.