

Health & Beauty

To kiss or not to kiss?

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How often can I wash my hands without being diagnosed with OCD? Make like Lady Macbeth and scrub, scrub away with soap and hot water. Doctors say hands left un-sanitised can transfer the microbes (especially if people cough or sneeze into them).

How far is too far away to stand?

The new social boundaries are being negotiated daily — on the street, in bars, at the cinema. Enunciate clearly and you should get away with a good two metres.

Obviously social kissing is out (quel relief for us chilly northerners) but what are the alternatives?

May I recommend the Japanese bow, the air kiss or a curt nod. Possibly high-fives with a close blood relative.

Is it OK to wear surgical gloves to a party?

Bit extreme, unless you team them with your [Michael Jackson](#)-style Balmain jacket and face mask. However, it goes without saying that gloves are the perfect accompaniment to a sex party in a stately home.

If a man sneezes all over a pregnant woman on the Tube, can we lynch him?

Go right ahead. Two of the fatalities so far have been mothers. According to health authorities, the spread is mostly airborne through virus-laden droplets. The proper way of coughing is to carry a handkerchief or splutter into one's shirt, holding the neckline over one's face.

Should I disguise my hand sanitiser?

Actually, alcohol-based hand cleanser is the accessory du jour. Our new favourite is the tactfully named Frais, a cocktail of eight natural essential oils including ginger, tangerine, lemon myrtle and cardamom. Best of all, it sounds like a perfume from [Sarah Jessica Parker](#).

I'm shy/lazy/inhibited — how do I cultivate a "flu friend" to bring me supplies of anti-viral on my sick bed?

Lovey, flu-friendship is a 20-year relationship in the making. At this late stage I'd go for bribery or a mention in the will. Or cultivate a fellow loner.

Is it OK to hand out tissues on the Tube?

The Mother Teresa look can be a bit showy on the Victoria line. But yes, be generous.

My newsagent was sniffing. Is it rude to say "keep the change"?

Coins may harbour up to 1,000 bacteria and paper money a few million (no wonder — money is a metaphor for contamination for writers from Dickens to Freud). Tip the cabbie, forget the change. Disinfect your credit card nightly.

What are the rules about food-sharing?

Say no to tapas, double-dipping (carrot goes once in mouth and never back in the hummus), fondue or shared dessert forking. One SF victim can backdate infection to a party where guests took it in turns to sup from a communal cup. The answer is simple: buy disposable chopsticks or chip "sporks" in bulk.

What are the new rules about dating?

No kissing, tops off or staying overnight until date five. Condoms, obviously. Don't share toothbrushes. The National Childbirth Trust did originally say avoid pregnancy but has since downgraded its advice.

Can I refuse to try on "used" clothes in the changing room?

Yes, if you prefer to be snobbish rather than stricken. One shop in the [West Midlands](#), where swine flu has been most acute, even took to banning infected shoppers. But anecdotal evidence says you lose weight with SF — a dream for the crazed fashionista.

What counts as an unnecessary crowd? Can I ask my colleagues to move into the stock room?

No one likes a Typhoid Mary. Grow up.

The best way to cope if a friend appears to have symptoms?

Step back, smile consolingly and remember an urgent appointment. And if said friend approaches saying, "Feel my head — I've got a temperature", bolt for the hills.

Is it OK to a) stockpile Tamiflu or b) buy it on the internet?

a) No, it's thoughtless and will drive up demand. b) Certainly not. How do you know it's not cut with boot polish — or worse?

The local surgery has run out of vaccine. What about a little gentle rioting?

Darling, we're British. Panicking won't change a thing.

Is it OK to throw a swine flu party?

Cool teens who watch *Skins* may think so but this one is more scary than mumps. Arguably every party is a swine flu party these days unless of course you adhere to the no kissing/latex glove-wearing rules, above.

How about visiting the sick? Is it acceptable to pour soup through the letterbox, then run away?

Risky. Remember, if we all survive this, fairweather friends will be persona non grata. On the plus side, no carer has yet been a fatality, so maybe karma works.

Is it rude to have a bucket of disinfectant by the desk? And front door?

Can't hurt. During the foot-and-mouth endemic of 2001, we all had to walk through foot dips and mats. Hell for the Manolos. Reserve it for real enemies.

All my posh friends have got SF (plus Cherie Blair, national newspaper journalists and pupils of Rugby, Stowe etc). Should I feel a bit left out?

As in everything, class matters. But actually SF is no respecter of postcodes. The highest rates are in [Tower Hamlets](#), [Islington](#) and [Newham](#). [Kensington and Chelsea](#) had a mere 45 cases at last count (clearly because the residents don't use public transport).

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Mwah, mwah: with swine flu rampant, Karolina Kurkova (left) and Lindsay Lohan know that the air kiss is the correct form of greeting

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