Better Beware

Infectious illnesses are caused by pathogens, including bacteria and viruses, which can be passed from one person to another through everyday activities. Some pathogens (aka germs) can be spread through indirect contact, like sharing a keyboard or cell phone. Others require direct contact, such as kissing or sharing food.[1]

Use the chart below to track how you come in contact with germs every day. First, fill in some examples of indirect and direct contact that happen in each of the places listed. (The first one is filled in for you.) Use the extra space to add other places that are part of your everyday routine, such as an after-school job.

Now focus on your examples of direct contact. For the next week, keep a tally of how often you engage in each of these behaviors and any other direct contact behaviors that might happen during the week.

Places	Types of Contact		How Often?
	Indirect	Direct	(direct contact)
Home	Share the bathroom doorknob	Share eating utensils	
School			
Sports and after-school clubs			
Social outings: (parties, restaurants, concerts, etc.)			

At the end of the week, discuss in class any patterns you've noticed and think about some solutions to keep yourself and others safe from germs. Write your observations below.

The direct contact germ-sharing behavior I engage in most frequently is:

_____

Steps I can take to prevent the spread of infectious diseases:

_____

Meningococcal disease, including meningitis B, is a rare but potentially deadly bacterial infection that can be spread through direct contact with respiratory or throat secretions. This includes the normal things you and your friends do, like drinking from each other's water bottles and sharing lipgloss.[2] That's one reason why teens and young adults are among those at increased risk for this illness.[1] Students sharing living quarters in college dorms are especially at increased risk.[1,3] And since nearly 1 in 4 young adults is a carrier of the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease,[4] even if they never get sick or show any symptoms, it's important to *beware when you share.*

References: 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Meningococcal disease. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html. Updated April 1, 2014. Accessed April 2, 2015. 2. Thompson MJ, Ninis N, Perera R, et al. Clinical recognition of meningococcal disease in children and adolescents. *Lancet.* 2006;367(9508):397-403. 3. Bruce MG, Rosenstein NE, Capparella JM, et al. Risk factors for meningococcal disease in college students. *JAMA.* 2001;286(6):688-693. 4. Christensen H, May M, Bowen L, et al. Meningococcal carriage by age: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Lancet Infect Dis.* 2010;10(12):853-861.

Check with your doctor about getting vaccinated against meningitis B — the strain of meningococcal disease that pre-2014 vaccines in the U.S. could not help prevent.