

Springtime flying can be the most troublesome of all. No, not from pilots setting the plane down in the Hudson River. It's getting germs from fellow passengers and from the recycled air flowing throughout the cabin.

How do you keep at least some of those little unseen bugs from getting at you on a flight? You've gotta be kidding. Just ask anyone who has flown from New York to London or similar hours-long air journey squeezed into a five-across row of sardine-can sized seats. They'll know that Murphy's Law always kicks in for the haplessly trapped until-then healthy flyer.



Seated on one side will be an old geezer with a bad cold and a big red nose that could easily guide Santa's sleigh. He'll spend the flight within inches of you coughing, dripping and sneezing. Of course, he'll be polite and turn his head each time ... right in the direction of your face.

On the other side will be a harried young mother with one or more crying, colicky babies whose coughs, sneezes and other bodily drippings will also inevitably be aimed at you. Even if you put on earphones, such as those Bose sound-proofing kind, the coughs, sneezes, screams and lamentations will easily penetrate enough to cave in your eardrums and several sections of your skull's zygomatic complex.

How can you avoid catching all of the diseases that are aimed at you from two directions while trapped like a sardine in a can? The quickest way is to call a flight attendant over and ask to change seats to another part of the passenger cabin. If it isn't a full flight, you may get your wish and fly the rest of the way germ free, at least without picking up any new ones. If not, when you get home, be prepared to tell your family to be sure to visit you in the pneumonia ward of the local hospital.

Seriously, one of the best ways to fight in-flight germs is to go aboard prepared. Eat very modestly, drink plenty of fluids and carry a small supply of over-the-counter cold remedies. Additionally, some people believe a shot or two of whiskey or brandy before boarding can do wonders in fending off the nasty little bugs.

If you tend to get air sick, bring along appropriate pills and take them with plenty of water. Wash your hands as often as possible, especially before and after handling food and using

bathrooms. There are several personal items you can use at any time, such as little bottles of alcohol-based hand cleaner and packages of wet, sanitized towelets.

In many Asian cities and in air and train travel from that part of the world, people wear medical face masks that filter out germs and other impurities in the air. That hasn't quite caught on in the U.S., but for travelers in crowded airplanes, trains and buses during winter months when colds are most prevalent, it may be a good idea. Fellow passengers may sneer at you, but that's easier to take than a bad cold, flu or worse.