



Handkerchief or Tissues? That is the Question!

By the Water Quality & Health Council

Ah-choo! How do you handle sneezes and a runny nose? Do you reach for a *handkerchief* or *tissues*? Which option is more sanitary? Which option is most environmentally responsible? How do affordability, comfort and convenience factor into your decision? More men than women may prefer handkerchiefs, but that may be changing. Rather than endorse one option over another, we provide the following analysis for your consideration.



Whether you use a handkerchief or tissues when you are sick, leaving them out on a common surface only helps spread your germs.

Comparing Handkerchiefs and Tissues

	Handkerchief	Tissues
How Sanitary?	Handkerchiefs are adequately sanitary if stored away immediately after use (e.g., in a pocket or purse), followed by the user washing his or her hands. (Exposure risk remains for the person laundering handkerchiefs.)	Tissues are adequately sanitary if disposed of immediately after use, followed by the user washing his or her hands. (Exposure risk remains for the person removing trash.)
How Environmentally Responsible?	Laundered handkerchiefs can be reused many times. Laundering and ironing require energy, water, detergent and sanitizer (see directions below for sanitizing with bleach).	Tissues are manufactured from a renewable resource using energy, water and chemicals. Used tissues can be composted, or they enter the general waste stream.
How Comfortable and Convenient?	Handkerchiefs can be purchased to please the user's preferences in fabric and size. They can be laundered to enhance softness (e.g., with fabric softener).	Portable tissue packets are available as well as a range of tissue box shapes and sizes. Tissues pre-moistened with aloe and other products are also available to help soothe irritated skin.

Our advice is to choose the option you prefer based on the factors that mean the most to you. Whichever choice you make, help reduce the likelihood of spreading germs by staying mindful that germs go wherever nasal mucous goes. For example, blowing your nose and leaving the handkerchief or tissues in the open

may infect others in your living or work space. Not washing your hands (or at least using a hand sanitizer) after blowing your nose is another way to spread your illness to others through commonly touched surfaces. What is the “life cycle” of the item used to wipe your nose? How can you minimize the risk of spreading germs through that item? It’s not rocket science, but it is worth some thought.

How to Launder Cotton or Poly/cotton Handkerchiefs

According to the [Clorox website](#), soak chlorine-bleachable laundry in ¼ cup regular bleach per gallon of water or 3 tablespoons of concentrated bleach per gallon of water for up to 5 minutes. Rinse. Follow-up with a hot water machine wash using detergent and bleach.

Gesundheit!