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Remember to Wash Your Hands to Prevent Illness

(COLUMBUS, Ohio) — December 4 – 10, 2011 is National Hand Washing Awareness Week. Did you know hand washing is by far one of the best ways to prevent germs from spreading and to keep you and your family from getting sick?

Hand washing is the first line of defense against germs. Germs, such as bacteria and viruses, can be transmitted several different ways, especially by touching dirty hands or other contaminated surfaces.

“People who know where their hands are and what they are doing at all times are hand aware,” said Will Sawyer, M.D., a solo family physician in Cincinnati, Ohio.

When germs are picked up, you can unknowingly become infected simply by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Once you are infected, it is usually just a matter of time before the whole family comes down with the same illness.

“I recommend everyone follow the four principles of hand awareness: 1) wash your hands when they are dirty and before eating; 2) do not cough into your hands; 3) do not sneeze into your hands; 4) above all, do not put your fingers into your eyes, nose or mouth,” said Sawyer.

Good hand washing is your first line of defense against the spread of many illnesses – and not just the common cold. More serious illnesses such as meningitis, bronchiolitis, influenza, hepatitis A and most types of infectious diarrhea can be stopped with the simple act of washing your hands.

Make sure to wash your hands correctly several times a day using warm water, lathering soap for 10 to 15 seconds, rinsing and drying your hands with a clean towel.

Do not underestimate the power of hand washing; the few seconds you spend at the sink could save you trips to the doctor’s office.

“Another important tip is to not touch the T Zone. The T Zone is the mucus membrane of the eyes, nose and mouth, which are the only portal of entry into the human body for all respiratory infections (flu and flu-like illness). This is an important health behavior in order to “stay well,” concluded Sawyer.

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,100 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.



FACT SHEET

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Germs are spread through:

- Contaminated water and food
- Droplets released during a cough or sneeze
- Contaminated surfaces
- A sick person's body fluids

Minimize the germs passed around your family by making it a rule to wash hands:

- Before eating and cooking
- After using the bathroom
- After cleaning around the house
- After touching animals, including family pets
- After visiting or taking care of any sick friends or relatives
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After being outside (playing, gardening, walking the dogs, etc.)

How to wash your hands correctly:

- Use warm water
- Use soap and lather up for about 10 to 15 seconds (antibacterial soap is not necessary – any soap will do)
- Make sure you get in between your fingers and under the nails where uninvited germs like to hang out; and do not forget the wrists
- Rinse and dry well with a clean towel

Sources: www.familydoctor.org
www.henrythehand.com