

Sick of Being Sick?

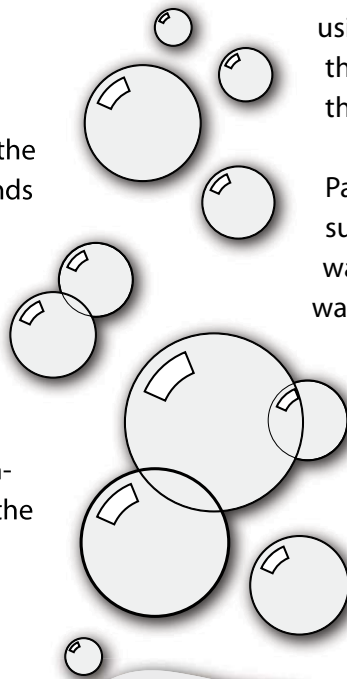
What if you had a cheap and easy way to prevent colds and flu? What would it be worth to you? Well, there is a way! It is simply hand washing. It is worth learning and using proper hand washing techniques. In one study, children who washed their hands properly had 24 percent fewer sick days due to respiratory illness and 51 percent fewer days lost because of an upset stomach. Hand washing is your best defense against diseases for adults as well as for children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The CDC has developed guidelines for how hands should be washed: Turn on the water and adjust to warm, wet your hands and wrists. Wet the hands and apply a small amount (dime to quarter size) of liquid soap to hands. Work soap into a lather. Briskly rub together all surfaces of the lathered hands for 15 seconds. Sing “Happy Birthday” or the “Alphabet Song” while you are washing. This gives you about 15 seconds—the

time needed for a thorough cleaning. Vigorous rubbing helps to remove germs. Germs can hide, so wash between fingers, around and under rings, around cuticles, and under fingernails, around the tops and palms of hands. Rinse hands thoroughly under a stream of water. Running water washes germs away. Point fingers down so germs won’t be washed up your arm. Leave the water running while drying hands. Dry hands completely with a clean, dry towel or paper towel. Turn the faucet off

using the towel as a barrier between your hands and the faucet handle. Remember, dirty hands turned the faucet on.

Pans of water and wipes shouldn’t be used as a substitute for washing hands with soap and running water. Germs pass from dirty hands into pans of water. If running water is unavailable, such as during an outing, wipes may be used as a temporary measure until hands can be washed under running water. If pans of water must be used, make sure you clean and disinfect the pan between each use.



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When to Wash Hands?

The best answer to this question is OFTEN. Because disease-causing germs can easily be transferred to food, surfaces, and people. Remember to wash hands at these times of day:

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- After using the rest room
- After coughing or sneezing
- After changing diapers or helping a child use a toilet
- After work or outdoor activities
- After handling money
- After handling trash or taking out garbage
- After petting an animal
- After work or play
- Whenever hands come in contact with body fluids (i.e. runny nose, watery eyes, saliva); for instance, after wiping a child's nose or mouth
- More frequently when someone in the home is sick
- When hands are dirty

You may feel like you repeat yourself over and over when reminding your kids to wash their hands before eating or at other times that are recommended, but it's a message worth repeating. Hand washing is by far the best way to prevent germs from spreading and to keep your kids from getting sick.

Germ Surprises in the Home

Most people are surprised to learn that you get more germs on your hands at the end of a meal than from using a public rest room.

But this makes sense if you know the habits of germs. The most germ-filled place in your house is the kitchen. The worst offender is the kitchen sponge or dish towel, followed closely by your kitchen faucet. Bacteria colonies with a total population exceeding fifty million can live on a single dirty sponge. And that's what you use to clean!

One way to kill germs is to soak your kitchen sponge for about a minute in a solution of bleach and water (1 Tablespoon of bleach to a quart of water) after each use. Another option is to boil the sponge for three minutes. Dishwashers and microwaves are not as effective.

You can wash dishcloths in the washing machine, making sure you use bleach and hot water.

House cleaning is also a time when germs are spread. You may be picking up more than the dirty laundry, you are also sharing germs. Once germs enter your home it can help if you know where germs like to hide. Some viruses and bacteria can live from twenty minutes up to two hours on surfaces in your home. Telephone receivers, doorknobs, and light switches are all favorite places for germs. Clean these areas carefully and wash your hands well afterwards.



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Developed by the Penn State Better Kid Care Program
253 Easterly Parkway, State College, PA 16801 • Phone: 1-800-452-9108 • Website: betterkidcare.psu.edu.

Dr. James E. Van Horn, Better Kid Care Program Director, Lyn Horning, Assistant Director of Programs