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August 31, 2010

WELLNESS WEEKLY

Washing Your Hands

One of the Easiest Ways to Prevent Infection

Hand washing is a simple habit, something most people do without thinking. Yet hand washing, when done properly, is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick.



The dangers of not washing your hands

Despite the proven health benefits of hand washing, many people don't practice this habit as often as they should — even after using the restroom. Throughout the day you accumulate germs on your hands from a variety of sources, such as direct contact with people, contaminated surfaces, foods, and even animals. If you don't wash your hands frequently enough, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. And you can spread these germs to others by touching them or by touching surfaces they also touch, such as doorknobs. Infectious diseases that are commonly spread through hand-to-hand contact include the common cold, flu and several gastrointestinal disorders.

When should you wash your hands?

Although it's impossible to keep your bare hands germ-free, there are times when it's critical to wash your hands to limit the transfer of bacteria and viruses. Always wash your hands:

- * After using the restroom
- * After changing a diaper- wash the diaper-wearer's hands, too
- * After touching animals or animal waste
- * Before and after preparing food, especially before and immediately after handling raw meat, poultry or fish
- * Before eating
- * After blowing your nose
- * After coughing or sneezing into your hands
- * Before and after treating wounds or cuts
- * Before and after touching a sick or injured person
- * After handling garbage
- * Before inserting or removing contact lenses
- * When using public restrooms, such as those in airports, train stations, bus stations and restaurants

Proper hand-washing techniques

The combination of scrubbing your hands with soap and rinsing them with water loosens and removes bacteria from your hands. To properly clean your hands:

- * Wet your hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clean bar soap. Lather well.
- * Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 to 20 seconds.
- * Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- * Rinse well.
- * Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
- * Use a towel to turn off the faucet.