Wash Your Hands and Wash Them Well!

Proper and frequent hand washing is one of the easiest ways to avoid getting sick. The common cold, flu, and infectious diarrhea are commonly spread through hand-to-hand contact. The flu can be serious (especially for older adults and those with chronic medical problems). The flu combined with pneumonia is the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S.

When should you wash your hands?

After a trip to the bathroom or after changing a diaper • After touching animals or animal waste • Before, after, and even during food preparation • Before eating • After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing • Before and after treating wounds or touching a sick person • After handling garbage • Before touching contact lenses

A 2005 study showed that hand-washing cut in half children’s risk of pneumonia and diarrhea, so teach children good hand-washing techniques by your example.

The ABCs of Hand-Washing

Warm water is just right. Hot water’s hard on the skin. Cold won’t make suds.

Lather up. You don’t need to kill germs with pricey antibacterial soap. Just dislodge them with a good lather.

Soap it all. Get thumbs, backs of hands, under nails.

Sing “Happy Birthday” twice. That’s 15 seconds of scrubbing.

Don’t skimp on rinse water. Flush away suds and germs.

In a public washroom, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the exit door.

Prayer: Thank you, gracious God, for the many simple ways you have given us to stay healthy. Help me do my part in staying well this winter. Amen.

Your Advocate
Meet Linda Stein

Stein is Manager of Infection Control at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge. Contact her at Linda.Stein@advocatehealth.com.

Linda Stein’s passion for infection prevention was there at the start when she was an intensive care nurse. Whether in the cardiac lab or the ICU, Stein promoted safe practices because she wanted to keep people safe.

“Today parents are teaching kids to do the right thing about disease prevention in the form of washing their hands,” says Stein. “It’s becoming part of the culture!” Learning about hand hygiene needs to happen when children are young so that it’s part of their daily routine.

“I think it’s great that we now have alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Let’s face it -- you can’t always find a sink! But these you can carry in a purse or a backpack,” Stein offers.

“Adults and older kids like using sanitizers. They’re quick. They’re convenient. And they address the heightened fear factor,” Stein admits. Hand sanitizers which contain at least 60% alcohol are actually more effective than soap and water in killing bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

Germs can live from a few seconds to 48 hours, depending on the specific virus and the type of surface. Flu viruses live longer than cold viruses. Both live longer on non-porous surfaces like plastic, metal, and wood than on porous surfaces like paper, fabric, and skin.

“Soaps work and sanitizers work,” Stein confirms, “but when your hands look dirty, use soap and water please!”

- Advocatehealthcare.com
- cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- nih.gov (National Institute of Health)
- health.kaboose.com (Kaboose, Inc.)
- helium.com/knowledge/96147 (What your children should know about personal hygiene)

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