

Hand-Washing Awareness

Issue 1

December 2009

It does make a difference!

An interesting study was done recently that once again illustrates the importance of hand-washing to control the transmission of viruses. Twenty vaccinated, antibody-positive health care workers had their hands contaminated with an infectious dose of a live H1N1 influenza virus. Some research subjects get all the luck!

The experimental conditions included no hand washing, soap and water, and 3 different alcohol based hand-rubs. Marked antiviral efficacy was noted for all 4 hand-washing protocols. What was most interesting, however, was that the soap and water conditioning was significantly superior to all other conditions. Hand-washing is readily available to all of us, and it only takes a few minutes of our time- but it plays an important role in keeping us healthy.

December is hand-washing awareness month!

You have heard it for year- washing our hands regularly is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infection and illness. But health knowledge does not always translate to improved health behavior, and that seems to be the case with hand-washing. Situations that increase the importance of hand-washing include:

- Communal living environments (college dorms!)
- Before preparing foods
- After handling uncooked meat and poultry
- Before eating meals
- After changing diapers
- After blowing one's nose, sneezing or coughing
- After using the bathroom

Wash Your Hands: The Right Way

When washing hands with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water
- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands for 15-20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing "Happy Birthday" twice through to a friend.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use your paper towel to turn off the faucet.
- Always use soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.

If soap and clean water are not available, an alcohol-based instant hand sanitizer should be used.

Keep the Kitchen Clean!

- Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you prepare the next food.
- Consider using paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often using the hot cycle of your washing machine. If using a sponge to clean up, microwave it each evening for 30 seconds or place it in the dishwasher.
- Rinse *all* fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water. This includes those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. For firm-skin fruits and vegetables, rub with your hands or scrub with a clean vegetable brush while rinsing.

Clean Hands Coalition

The Clean Hands Coalition (CHC) is a unified alliance of public and private partners working together to support coordinated, sustained initiatives to significantly improve health and save lives through clean hands.

Healthy Schools, Healthy People – It's a SNAP

A hands-on initiative for middle schools is designed to help keep students in school and learning by improving overall health through promoting clean hands.

Sources: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/HandWashing/>