

Handwashing prevents communicable diseases

What people need to know about handwashing

When done correctly, handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

Good handwashing technique is easy to learn and can significantly reduce the spread of infectious diseases among both children and adults.

Spreading Disease: Handwashing can stop three of the main ways in which diseases spread between people:

(1) **Indirect contact with respiratory secretions.** Many diseases are spread indirectly by infected people who cough or sneeze into their hands, leaving respiratory discharges that can be picked up by other people when they touch or shake hands. Sneezers and coughers, wash your hands! The rest of us need to remember to wash our hands after touching anyone who has been coughing and sneezing. *Influenza* (flu), *streptococcus*, *respiratory syncytial virus* (RSV) and the *common cold* are just a few of the illnesses that can spread this way.

(2) **Contact with body fluids.** Urine, saliva and other moist body substances can spread microbes including *cytomegalovirus*, *typhoid*, *staphylococcal organisms* and *Epstein-Barr virus*. These germs can be transmitted from person to person or indirectly by contamination of food or objects such as toys.

(3) **Fecal-oral transmission.** This refers to diseases we get by ingesting fecal material, which happens more often than we'd like to imagine—usually because someone forgets to wash their hands after using the toilet and then touches food, drinks or other items. The germs are transferred to others who touch those items later. Many types of microbes are transmitted this way, including *salmonellosis*, *shigellosis*, *hepatitis A*, *giardiasis*, *enterovirus*, *amebiasis* and *campylobacteriosis*.

Technique: There's probably more to good handwashing than you think, so take your time and do it right: by rubbing your hands vigorously with soapy water, you pull soils and the oily dirt away from your skin. The lather traps the dirt and germs so they can be rinsed away.

Lather with soap for at least 10 seconds. Wash the front and back of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails. Rinse your hands well under warm running water and dry them completely with a clean towel. You can be extra careful by using a clean paper towel to turn off the water and then throwing it away.

When washing hands, it is important not to do the following:

- Don't use a single damp cloth to wash a group of children's hands.
- Don't use a standing basin of water to rinse hands.
- Don't use a hand towel used by others. Use disposable towels in day care or food preparation settings.
- Don't use sponges or non-disposable cleaning cloths unless you launder them on a regular basis, adding chlorine bleach to the wash water.

Teach the Kids: Encourage children to wash their hands before eating, after playing outdoors or playing with pets, after using the bathroom and after blowing their noses. Even though hands might look clean, they often carry germs or microorganisms that are capable of causing disease.

Don't assume that kids know how to wash their hands properly. Showing and helping them, especially in a day care setting, is the best way to form good habits in children.

Antibacterial Gels: Antibacterial gels, which can be found wherever soap is sold, are very effective at killing germs on the hands as long as your hands are not visibly dirty. They should be used when soap and water are not readily available.

To use correctly, apply about a teaspoonful of the alcohol gel on the palm of one hand. Then rub all over both hands, making sure you rub the front, back, and fingernail areas of both hands. Let the alcohol dry, which should take about 30 seconds.

If hands look dirty but you have no other way to wash them, use the gel but wash with soap and water as soon as you can.

Source of Information: Medical College of Wisconsin submitted by Jan Jones, RN, CFISD Director for Health Services



Influenza (The Flu)

What is the flu (influenza)?

The flu is a highly contagious disease that is caused by the influenza virus which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat and lungs). Unlike many other viral infections, such as the common cold, the flu can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications in many people.

How does it spread?

The flu spreads easily from one person to another. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets containing the flu virus are released into the air. When you inhale these droplets, you can become infected with the flu (this is also known as "droplet spread"). A person can also catch the flu by touching an object that has infected droplets on it and then touching their own nose or mouth before washing their hands.

Who should get the flu shot?

- Children 6-59 months of age.
- Children with high risk conditions and chronic diseases such as asthma, immune suppression, diabetes and sickle cell anemia among others
- Adults 50 years of age and older.
- Adults with high risk conditions such as diabetes.
- Health-care workers.
- Adults that take care of children, such as daycare workers and teachers.

What can I do to protect my child against the flu?

- Take your child to get a flu shot.
- Encourage your child's daycare provider or teacher to get a flu shot.
- Encourage family members and friends to get a flu shot.
- Get a flu shot yourself.

Flu vaccine myths and facts

Myth: The flu isn't a serious disease.

Fact: Influenza (flu) is a serious disease of the nose, throat and lungs that can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. Most people who die due to flu complications are 65 years and older. But small children less than 2 years old are also at risk of being hospitalized because of the flu.

Myth: You must get the flu vaccine before December.

Fact: The best time to get a flu shot is October or November. But you can get vaccinated in December or later. For more information, ask your healthcare provider.

Myth: The flu shot does not work.

Fact: Most of the time the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70 to 90 percent when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. Getting the flu shot is your best protection against this disease.