

# STOP CLEAN YOUR HANDS

A Safe and  
Useful Guide  
to Proper  
Hand Cleaning  
Techniques

# HAVE YOU CLEANED YOUR HANDS?

This question is heard in many homes and daycare centres throughout Canada several times a day. The source? Parents and caregivers. The reason? Cleaning your hands is highly effective in reducing the spread of bacteria and viruses that cause disease. In fact, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada frequent hand cleaning is the single best way to prevent the spread of many common diseases (2008). But, like many things in life, what often seems like a very simple solution can often be difficult to put into practice on a regular basis.

In order to be effective, hand cleaning must be done regularly and correctly. That's because bacteria, viruses, and other infectious agents are found everywhere around us : in our homes, workplaces, and the community.

Germs can be spread easily among people and they can live for a surprisingly long time on hard surfaces like desks, doorknobs, and counters. Most people get sick when they touch something that is contaminated with germs and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. These germs are then passed to other people through direct contact, such as a handshake, or indirectly through coughing and sneezing. Sometimes, what we eat or drink is contaminated, which then acts as a vehicle for spreading germs or bacteria like salmonella or E.coli. Even our pets, such as dogs and cats, can be a source of many different germs that can make us sick. Simply put, germs spread from people to people, people to food, food to people, and animals to people, either directly or indirectly.

Just like wearing a seat belt or putting on an oven mitt before touching something hot, cleaning your hands routinely and correctly makes good sense. So, ask yourself, do I know how many times I cleaned my hands today? Do I follow the recommended procedure when I clean my hands? Read on for more information on when hand cleaning is recommended, and to ensure that it is being done correctly.

# Reduce the harm, cough into your arm



## Myth:

**WHILE MANY PEOPLE THINK THAT IT IS CLEAN AND SANITARY WHEN THEY COVER THEIR COUGH WITH THEIR HAND, THIS IS NOT THE CASE.**

Instead, they have just deposited thousands of germ-containing droplets onto their hands, spreading them to everything they touch, including the hands of others. If you don't have a tissue, the proper coughing etiquette is to cough into your elbow or arm. This significantly reduces the number of airborne droplets and helps keep your hands clean.

**It is important to clean your hands often and after certain activities to limit the spread of bacteria, viruses, and other disease-causing germs.**

Pay attention for a day to see how many of the following activities you do and if you clean your hands after each one. If not, you may be transmitting harmful germs to yourself and those around you.

## Did you clean your hands...

### **AFTER:**

- using the bathroom?
- changing a diaper?
- dealing with animal waste?
- blowing your nose?
- handling garbage?
- using someone else's workstation?
- using exercise equipment at the gym?
- touching shopping carts?
- playing with pets?

### **BEFORE AND AFTER:**

- preparing food, especially before and immediately after handling raw meat, poultry, or fish?
- eating?
- treating wounds or cuts?
- touching a sick or injured person?
- inserting or removing contact lenses?
- breastfeeding



# WHY?

WHY IS CLEANING YOUR HANDS SO IMPORTANT

**There are numerous infectious diseases that can be largely prevented through immunization.**

**HOWEVER, THERE ARE MANY FOR WHICH THERE ARE NO VACCINES.**

These include everything from the common cold to life-threatening diseases such as necrotizing fasciitis, otherwise known as flesh-eating disease.

Viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi can cause many types of infections. These disease-causing germs can be easily picked up from other people, surfaces we touch, foods we eat, and animals we come into contact with.

Cleaning your hands, when done correctly and routinely, is one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. It removes disease-causing germs from our hands and prevents the spread to others.

The value of hand cleaning has been widely recognized for sometime in significantly preventing food borne illnesses as well as other infectious diseases that can be severe and even life-threatening. As an indication of how many Canadians could reduce their risk through proper hand cleaning, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency estimates that between 11 and 13 million of us suffer from food borne illnesses annually (2006). Most of these illnesses are entirely preventable.

Sneezing and coughing are other ways that many viruses and bacteria are commonly spread. That's because they live in saliva and mucus found in our nose and throat.



**“HANDS SPREAD AN ESTIMATED  
80 PERCENT OF INFECTIOUS  
DISEASES LIKE THE COMMON  
COLD AND INFLUENZA.”**



# HOW?

HOW DO I CLEAN MY HANDS

**There are two ways to remove germs, including viruses and bacteria, from your hands: by washing them and by using a hand sanitizer.**

## HOW HANDWASHING WORKS

Handwashing removes the visible dirt and any attached germs by pulling the dirt and oily soils free from your skin. This happens when you rub your hands together with warm, soapy water for at least 15 seconds, and then rinse everything off.

If it is not possible to wash your hands, then hand sanitizers are the next best option. While sanitizers do not remove the dirt on your hands, they do kill any germs present. An effective sanitizer should contain at least 70% ethyl alcohol (PIDAC, 2008).

If your hands are too dirty, the sanitizer may not be able to penetrate through all the soil. For this reason, using soap and water is still the best option for keeping yourself and those around you healthy.



# Effective Hand Washing



## WET HANDS

Remove jewelry and watch, and wet hands with warm water first.



## SOAP

Be sure to use enough liquid soap.



## LATHER WELL

Lather for 15-20 seconds. Clean wrists, palms, back of hands, and between fingers.



## RINSE

Rinse with warm water. Be sure not to touch side of sink.



## DRY

Dry hands completely with paper towel or with an air dryer.



## KEEP CLEAN

Use a paper towel to turn off water and open door, protecting hands from being recontaminated.



# WHAT?

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF GERMS?

## **Along with hand cleaning, you can take several other measures to reduce the spread of germs. These include:**

- Keep your vaccinations up to date.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your arm or tissue.
- Stay at home if you have signs and symptoms of an infection. Don't go to work if you're vomiting, have diarrhea, cough, or a fever. Don't send your child to school if he or she has these signs and symptoms.
- Similarly, don't prepare food if you are experiencing infection symptoms such as vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- Clean and disinfect your home regularly, especially the kitchen and bathroom. These places usually have the highest concentration of germs.
- Use your own toothbrush, comb, or razor. Avoid sharing dishes and eating utensils.
- Travel wisely. Avoid going on the plane, bus, or train when you're ill. With so many people confined to a small area, you may infect other passengers .
- Use paper towels. When visiting public restrooms, use paper towels to turn the taps on and off, and to open the door when leaving.

"...reduce the  
spread of  
germs...  
keep your  
distance"





# Effective Hand Sanitizing



Remove jewelry and watch. Apply sufficient sanitizer to palm, approximately the size of a loonie.



Rub hands together palm to palm, front and back for approx. 15-20 seconds.



Keep rubbing until hands are dry. Paper towels are not needed.

Why doesn't everyone clean or sanitize their hands as often as they should?

## **NO SOAP AVAILABLE.**

Use the hand sanitizer you carry with you. If you don't already carry one, this may be a good time to start.

## **SKIN IRRITATION OR ALLERGY TO PRODUCTS.**

Find a soap/sanitizer with 70%-90% alcohol that works for you, such as hypo allergenic, perfume free soaps, or ones with moisturizers (PIDAC, 2008).

## **IT TAKES TOO MUCH TIME.**

A few seconds for cleaning your hands will save you many days and possibly weeks that you might otherwise spend sick.

## Resources & Websites

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Clean Hands Resources

[www.cdc.gov/cleanhands](http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands)

Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education

[www.canfightbac.org/en](http://www.canfightbac.org/en)

American Society for Microbiology, Clean Hands Campaign

[www.washup.org](http://www.washup.org)

Handwashing for Life: Reducing the risk of food borne illness

[www.handwashingforlife.com](http://www.handwashingforlife.com)

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Handwashing

[www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/pubhealth/handwashing/handwashing\\_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/pubhealth/handwashing/handwashing_mn.html)

Canadian Pediatric Society: Handwashing for parents and kids

[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/healthybodies/handwashing.htm](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/healthybodies/handwashing.htm)

Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, Be Food Safe program

[www.befoodsafe.ca/en-home.asp](http://www.befoodsafe.ca/en-home.asp)



# Make it happen...at your workplace!

## HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT INFECTION PROTECTION PRACTICES.

- While at work, clean your hands routinely throughout the day.
- Place alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers (at least 70% alcohol) throughout the workplace, including outside all bathrooms and eating areas.
- Consider organizing a flu clinic for workers and family members to help increase the number of people who receive their flu shot.
- Insert information on vaccine recommendations for children and adults in employee pay stubs.
- Keep shared workstations clean to help protect co-workers from being exposed to infectious agents. This includes office equipment, machinery, and steering wheels.
- Be aware that even though you don't feel sick, you may still be contagious.
- Always keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold in a thermos or insulated lunch bag with freezer packs.
- Instead of shaking hands with friends and coworkers, consider other possible ways of greeting to help reduce the spread of germs.



**“CLEANING HANDS IS THE SINGLE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY YOU CAN PREVENT THE SPREAD OF INFECTION OR DISEASE.”**

**World Health Organization, Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care**

#### KEY REFERENCES:

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2006). *Causes of food borne illness*. Retrieved July 24, 2006, from <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/causee.shtml>

Luby, S., Agboatwalla, M., Feikin, D., Painter, J. Billhimer, W., Altaf, A., & Hoekstra, R. (2005). Effect of handwashing on child health: A randomized controlled trial. *The Lancet*, 366 (9481), 225-33.

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2002). *Why is handwashing important?*Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. (2008). *Best practices for hand hygiene in all health care settings*. Retrieved August 6, 2009, from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/diseases/ic\\_hh.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/diseases/ic_hh.html)



FOR MORE INFORMATION  
**WWW.CITYWELLNESS.CA**  
519-258-2146 ext. 3100

© Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, September 2009.