

Washing Your Hands Properly Can Save Your Life!

Hand washing Fact Sheet: According to the CDC, the single most important thing we can do to keep from getting sick and spreading illness to others is to clean our hands.

Infectious diseases, many of which are spread by unclean hands, remain the leading cause of death and disease worldwide and the third-leading cause of death in the United States.

Washing hands with soap and clean water for 20 seconds is a sensible strategy for hand hygiene in non-healthcare settings and is recommended by the CDC and other experts. If soap and clean water are not available, an alcohol-based hand hygiene product is recommended. However, when hands are visibly soiled, they should be washed with soap and water.

Colds: According to the CDC, there are more than 52 million cases of the common cold each year among Americans under the age of 17. Nearly 22 million school days are lost due to the common cold alone. Some viruses and bacteria can live from 20 minutes up to 2 hours or more on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks.

Children have about 6-10 colds a year, according to the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases. One important reason colds are so common in children is because they are often in close contact with each other in daycare centers and schools. In families with children in school, the number of colds per child can be as high as 12 a year. Adults average 2-4 colds a year, although the range varies widely.

Flu: The CDC estimates that 10-20 percent of Americans come down with the flu during each flu season, which typically lasts from November to March. Children are two to three times more likely than adults to get the flu, and children frequently spread the virus to others. Although most people recover from flu, the CDC estimates that in the United States more than 100,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die from the flu and its complications each year.

Foodborne Illness: Failure to wash, or insufficiently washing hands, contributes to almost 50 percent of all foodborne illness outbreaks, says the CDC. Hands can also transfer germs from contaminated raw meat, eggs, and poultry to other foods.

There are more than 250 foodborne illnesses. Food-related disease costs the United States between \$5-\$6 billion each year in health care expenditures and productivity losses.

Although many people are aware that you can get sick from eating food contaminated by *E. coli* O157:H7, there are other ways of acquiring these bacteria, such as touching surfaces contaminated with them.

The most frequently diagnosed foodborne bacterium is *Campylobacter*. Although found in various farm animals, *Campylobacter* in poultry is causing the most concern, according to the Food and Drug Administration. The CDC notes that *Campylobacter jejuni* is the leading cause of bacterial diarrheal illness in the United States, affecting an estimated 2.4 million people each year. Most of these are children under age 5 or young adults aged 15-29.

Pets: All pet owners need to take adequate measures after handling and cleaning up after their pets, including proper hand washing. Dog and cat saliva can contain any of more than 100 different germs that can make you sick. The CDC has also found an increased number of salmonella infections associated with reptiles in both adults and children.