

By Mary Ann Darda, Community Environmental Health Specialist

How many times did you hear your mother say “wash your hands” when you were little? Well, turns out mother had good reason to remind you to wash your hands.

Washing your hands is the single best action you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs. Some germs like the influenza virus, E. coli, and norovirus are easily spread from person to person and can make people very sick.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, a single gram of human feces (about the weight of a paper clip) can contain one Trillion germs. Think about how many common things you touch every day and how many opportunities you have to pick up and spread germs. Yuck!

When should you wash your hands? Anytime is a good time, but there are certain times when it is especially important:

- Before eating
- Before preparing or handling foods and drinks
- After using the bathroom
- After blowing your nose or coughing
- After smoking
- After changing a diaper
- After handling animals
- After playing or working outside
- Before and after visiting a sick friend or relative
- Anytime your hands are dirty

It is not enough to just wash your hands, but to be effective you have to wash properly. Don't worry: it's so easy a child can do it.

- Step 1: Wet hands with running water as hot as you can comfortably stand (at least 100°F).
- Step 2: Apply soap.
- Step 3: Vigorously scrub hands and arms for ten to fifteen seconds. Don't forget under your fingernails and between fingers.
- Step 4: Rinse thoroughly under running water.
- Step 5: Dry hands and arms with a single-use paper towel or warm-air hand dryer.

This whole process should take about 15-20 seconds - about the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday.”

What about hand sanitizers? The CDC says washing hands with soap and water is best, but if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol.

One last thing: Don't be afraid to ask your healthcare provider to wash their hands if you aren't sure if they already did so. It's your health.

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