



# Over the Edge

A quarterly publication for injury and illness prevention

Winter 2009

## HAND WASHING

Proper hygiene is the number one defense against viruses. The American Society for Microbiology conducted an experiment to find out how many people who said they washed their hands after using a public restroom actually did so, and discovered that only two-thirds were following through. Those who don't wash their hands are potentially spreading viruses and bacteria.

The risks of poor hand hygiene don't stop in the restroom. Microbes carrying cold and influenza can lurk for days on door handles, light switches, desks and computer keyboards. Then one touch to the nose or mouth, and a person may become ill. It is a vicious cycle that can quickly escalate to an epidemic. Symptoms can be hard on a healthy adult, but for children, the elderly and people with compromised immune systems, they can be deadly.

Hand washing by students, volunteers, and employees can protect everyone from disease, reduce absenteeism and "presenteeism" (sick people coming to work), increase productivity, protect funding in schools and help contain escalating group health insurance premiums.

**How to wash your hands.** It's generally best to wash your hands with soap and water. Follow these simple steps:

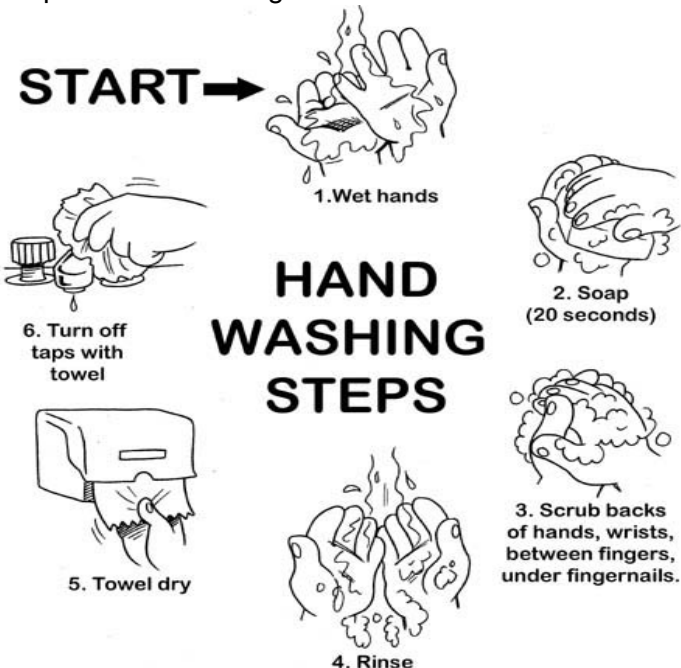
- Wet your hands with running water.
- Apply liquid, bar or powder soap.
- Lather well.
- Rub your hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Remember to scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry your hands with a clean, disposable towel or air dryer.
- If possible, use your towel to turn off the faucet.
- Keep in mind that antibacterial soap is no more effective at killing germs than is regular soap. Using antibacterial soap may even lead to the development of bacteria that are resistant to the product's antimicrobial agents — making it harder to kill these germs in the future.

**When to wash your hands?** As you touch people, surfaces and objects throughout the day, you accumulate germs on your hands. In turn, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your

eyes, nose or mouth. Although it's impossible to keep your hands germ-free, washing your hands frequently can help limit the transfer of bacteria, viruses and other microbes.

1. Always wash your hands before:
  - Preparing food or eating food or snacks
  - Treating wounds or giving medicine
  - Touching a sick or injured person
  - Inserting or removing contact lenses
2. Always wash your hands after:
  - Preparing food, especially raw meat/poultry
  - Using the toilet
  - Changing a diaper
  - Touching an animal or animal toys, leashes or waste
  - Blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing into your hands
  - Treating wounds
  - Touching a sick or injured person
  - Handling garbage or tools that could be contaminated, such as a broom or mop.
  - Of course, it's also important to wash your hands whenever they look dirty.

Officials from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) hope hand washing becomes a habit. With the



H1N1 pandemic in full force and the flu season progressing, now is not the time for us to let our guard down when it comes to proper hand hygiene.



## H1N1 AND SEASONAL FLU WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM GETTING SICK?

This season, there is a seasonal flu vaccine to protect against seasonal flu viruses and a 2009 H1N1 vaccine to protect against the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus (sometimes called "swine flu"). A flu vaccine is the first and most important step in protecting against flu infection.

For information about the 2009 H1N1 vaccines, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/>

For information about seasonal influenza vaccines, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/>.

There are also everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like the flu. **Take these everyday steps to protect your health.**

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.



- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.\*
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.

### Other important actions that you can take are:

- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs \*(for when soap and water are not available), tissues and other related items could help you to avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

**What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?** If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)

Keep away from others as much as possible. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

### If I have a family member at home who is sick with 2009 H1N1 flu, should I go to work?

Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with 2009 H1N1 flu can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day, and take everyday precautions including covering their coughs and sneezes and washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not available, they should use an alcohol-based hand rub.\* If they become ill, they should notify their supervisor and stay home. Employees who have an underlying medical condition or who are pregnant should call their health care provider for advice, because they might need to receive influenza antiviral drugs.

### What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. CDC recommends that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds.

**What should I do if I get sick?** For information about what to do if you get sick with flu-like symptoms this season, see <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/sick.htm>

**What should I do if I have a fever?** Fever can be one of the symptoms of a flu-like illness for many people. A fever is an oral temperature of at least 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). Signs of a fever include chills, a flushed appearance, feeling very warm, or sweating.

Fever-reducing medicines typically contain acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen (such as Motrin). These medicines can both help bring fever down and relieve pain.



To help avoid spreading the flu, if you have a fever, stay at home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or signs of a fever. However, if you're taking fever-reducing medicines, you cannot tell if your fever is truly gone. Therefore, when you start to feel better, increase the interval between doses of fever-reducing medicines and continue to monitor your temperature to make sure your fever does not return.