

Wash Your Hands to Prevent Colds and Flu



- The cold and flu season is upon us already and H1N1 is a threat.

- One of the most important ways to prevent the common cold and flu is by washing your hands.

It seems almost too simple, but frequent hand washing with warm soapy water is one of most effective means of preventing illness.

As we have learned these months one of the most frequent ways people catch colds is by rubbing their noses or eyes after their hands have been contaminated with the cold virus.

It is also important to remember that, other than a cold, some potentially serious diseases, such as hepatitis A, meningitis and infectious diarrhea, can easily be prevented if people make a habit of washing their hands.

For example, a study of 305 Detroit school children found that youngsters who washed their hands four times a day had 24 percent fewer sick days because of respiratory illness and 51 percent fewer days lost because of stomach upset. Teachers asked these children to wash their hands on arrival, before lunch, after recess and before leaving for the day.

Studies also show that most of us do not wash our hands as often as we think we do.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified common ways in which disease-causing germs are transmitted by contaminated hands.

These include nose, mouth or eyes to hands to others: Germs that cause colds, eye infections and other illnesses are spread to hands by sneezing, coughing, or rubbing the eyes. They are then transferred to others through direct contact or through foods handled by the infected person.

Wash your hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds before preparing or eating food, after using the restroom, after changing diapers, after touching a pet, after touching raw meat, poultry or fish and whenever hands come in contact with body fluids.

During the cold and flu season it is especially important to wash your hands more often. Most cold and flu viruses are spread by direct contact. Someone who has the flu sneezes onto his hand, and then touches the telephone, the keyboard or a drinking glass. The germs can live for hours -- in some cases weeks -- only to be picked up by the next person who touches the same object. So wash your hands often.

It is not necessary to use antibacterial soap. In fact, the American Academy of Microbiology warns against the widespread use of anti-microbial products, because they are likely to lead to the development of more resistant bacteria. Use a standard hand soap and dry your hands with a paper towel. Micro organisms can live and multiply on cloth towels, contaminating clean hands.