Handwashing - It Makes a Difference!

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Washing hands with soap and clean, warm, running water for 20 seconds is the best way. However, if soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based product to clean your hands.

How to Wash Hands With Soap & Water
- Wet your hands with clean, warm, running water and apply soap.
- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands for 20 seconds, the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry hands using a paper towel or air dryer.
- Use your paper towel to turn off the faucet.

How to Clean Hands Using an Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer
- Use a sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to be effective. Warning: For external use only. Supervise use by children.
- Apply sanitizer to the palm of your hand.
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

When Should Hands Be Washed?
- Whenever they look dirty
- Before and after preparing and eating food, especially before handling ready-to-eat foods and before and after handling raw meat, poultry or seafood
- After going to the bathroom and after changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom
- Before and after tending to someone who is sick or being near someone who is sick
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After handling an animal or animal waste
- After handling garbage
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After touching handrails, doorknobs, telephones and other public surfaces

Other Ways to Avoid Spreading Germs
- Do not cough or sneeze into your hands. (See ML-025340, Cover Your Cough).
- Do not put your fingers into your eyes, nose or mouth.

For more information on keeping hands and foods safe, see HGIC 3500, Basics of Safe Food Handling.

For ideas on teaching children about keeping hands clean to avoid germs, see HGIC 3607, Teaching Children About Food Safety.

Sources:
This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by P.H. Schmutz, HGIC Food Safety Specialist, and E.H. Hoyle, Extension Food Safety Specialist, Clemson University. (New 11/07.)

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