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Hand-washing: What you need to know, why it's so important



Washing your hands is good for your health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hand-washing is the “single most important means of preventing the spread of infection.” By frequently washing your hands, you wash away germs that you have picked up from other people, surfaces or from animals and their waste. Viruses can live on your hands for hours, and washing your hands regularly is a proven way to decrease your chances of getting sick.



Hand-washing: Get the facts

Think about all of the things that you touched today – from the toilet to your keyboard. No matter what you touched, you came in contact with germs. It's important to clean your hands before, during and after you prepare food and before you eat. You should especially do so after using the bathroom, touching animals or handling their waste, and when you're around somebody who's sick.

Did you wash your hands after you went to the bathroom today? (Really?) A study found that 91 percent of adults say they always wash their hands after using a public bathroom, but only 83 percent



were observed doing so. Teenagers aren't any better than adults: In a survey, only 58 percent of teen girls and 48 percent of teen boys washed up after using the restroom. Additionally, only 32 percent of people say they wash their hands after coughing or sneezing. So there is definitely room for improvement.



Remember, restaurant employees aren't the only ones who need to wash their hands before handling food. According to the Food and Drug Administration, proper hand-washing can stop up to half of all foodborne illnesses. Whether you're working in a five-star restaurant or your kitchen at home, wash your hands!

Hand-washing pays off for kids

Washing your hands can pay off big, especially for kids. Kids who wash their hands at least four times a day experience 24 percent fewer sick days from colds, the flu and similar illnesses, and 51 percent fewer sick days due to stomach ailments.

A CDC report found that proper hand-washing cut pneumonia-related infections in half among children under age 5 worldwide.

How to wash your hands the right way

Now that you know how important hand-washing is, here are a few tips on how to do it right: Wet your hands using warm water then wash with soap for 20 seconds (sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice). Rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all skin surfaces. Be sure to rinse all of the soap off your hands. In a pinch, when no soap and water is available, hand sanitizers can tide you over until you can reach a sink.

