

Health Tips

from New London Hospital

Hand Washing: Good for Cold Prevention, Too



Karen Chase, RN

Cold prevention with hand washing is one way you can stay well this season – and you might prevent other illnesses, too, such as the flu. Colds are spread mainly through respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes when someone has a cold. But many times, we unknowingly touch these miniscule droplets of cold germs on surfaces and then infect ourselves with the same cold virus. According to Karen Chase, RN and Director of Infection Control at New London Hospital, “Cold prevention with hand washing can keep you from passing on cold viruses – and picking up viruses on surfaces in your environment.”

About 80% of infectious diseases are transmitted by touch. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 36,000 people die from the flu or flu-like illness each year, and another 5,000 people die from foodborne illness each year. Your best protection from this type of illness is frequent hand washing. The simple friction that occurs when you rub skin against skin with warm water and soap, followed by thorough rinsing and drying, gets rid of potentially harmful bacteria.

Recently, Dr. Jose Montero, State Epidemiologist, spoke before groups in New London and Newport about infection control. “As Dr. Montero stated in his community presentations, you should wash your hands frequently throughout the day,” Karen explained. “These times include before and after you eat, after using the bathroom, after school, and after handling any contaminants like raw meat, unwashed vegetables, or garbage. Also wash your hands after coughing, or touching your pet. If you are babysitting, wash before and after changing the baby’s diapers and before and after feeding the baby.”

Keep an alcohol-based sanitizer for hands if a sink is unavailable. (Some experts believe the hand sanitizers may be more effective at killing bacteria and viruses than soap and water.) Rub the entire surface of your hands, fingers, and wrist with the sanitizer, then let it dry. You can use this throughout the day if you’re not near a bathroom. Follow up with a thorough hand scrub when you’re near a sink, to prevent buildup of the sanitizer.

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