

PROPER HANDWASHING; WAYS TO AVOID ILLNESS; FLU UPDATE

Washing hands often and well is one of the recommendations for avoiding illness. We often find that people don't know the proper way to wash their hands. I have listed the 6 steps of proper handwashing below that are recommended by the National Sanitation Foundation, along with some other recommendations from CDC on how to avoid illness.

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

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. When you wash your hands, use soap and warm, running water. The six steps to proper handwashing are:

1. Wet hands with warm, running water.
2. Apply soap.
3. Rub hands together vigorously.
4. Pay special attention to cleaning between fingers and around fingernails.
5. Rinse hands well.
6. Dry hands on paper towels.

Hands should be washed for at least 20 seconds.

CDC says that when soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

Wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- * Wash your hands often using the six-step procedure listed below.
- * Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- * Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- * Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and WASH YOUR HANDS. If you can't wash your hands, then use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- * If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

UGA Cobb County Extension
May 2009