

Adventist Healthcare: Health Tip of the Week

Importance of Hand Hygiene

Employee compliance with hand washing procedures rarely exceeds 40 percent in situations in which hand washing is deemed necessary, and is commonly done in less than 10 seconds. It is estimated that one in three people do not wash their hands after using the restroom.

Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Journals continue to publish reports of outbreaks of diseases transmitted by contaminated hands. It is recognized that even the common cold is spread much more readily through hand transmission than through airborne contagion. In addition to colds, infectious diseases like hepatitis A, meningitis, and infectious diarrhea can easily be prevented if people make a habit of washing their hands.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends hand washing for at least 15 seconds.

Soap and Warm Water

Soap combined with scrubbing action dislodges and removes germs. Because damaged skin carries up to twice the amount of bacteria, the drying effects of soap and water should be counteracted by the use of hand lotions to restore moisture levels.

Hands should always be washed with soap and warm water:

- * Before, during, and after you prepare foods
- * Before you eat
- * After you use the bathroom
- * After handling animals, animal waste, and garbage
- * More frequently when someone in your home is sick
- * When handling high-risk products or entering a high-risk area
- * When putting on gloves
- * Around children - before/after feeding them, diapering, and after handling bodily fluids

Alcohol-based Gels, Liquid and Foam Hand Sanitizers

Using an alcohol-based hand rub is a good alternative to hand washing if dirt does not need to be removed. Also, if there is limited time and no access to a sink. In some instances, hand rubs are more effective against viruses than hand washing. One of the risks inherent in hand washing is the possibility of recontamination due to contact with the faucet and/or sink.

Sources: CDC, American Society of Microbiology, American Pediatric Association, Royal Institute of Public Health and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.