

Handwashing is a Must!

Why Bother?

Harmful bacteria and viruses, such as *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *E. coli* and Hepatitis A, may be found on almost anything we touch. People can carry them in, or on their bodies, pick them up when handling pets (e.g. turtles, cats, dogs) or touch objects that have been previously contaminated. These harmful bacteria/viruses may be carried by apparently healthy people, animals, or clean objects.

Harmful bacteria and viruses can be transmitted to the foods we eat or anything else we may put into our mouth. These organisms can then make us sick. Large numbers of organisms are not always necessary to cause illness. Therefore, effective and timely handwashing is essential in preventing the spread of communicable diseases to both yourself and others.

Can Illness be Severe?

Yes! Most often infections lead to minor and self limiting bouts of fever, diarrhea, vomiting, nausea and/or cramps. However, it is now known that some infections can lead to long-term illness and death. For example, *E. coli* 0157:H7 can cause kidney failure and death; *Campylobacter jejuni* infections may lead to severe nervous system disorders; and *Salmonella* can lead to rheumatism.

Any Advice on Handwashing?

Yes! Effective handwashing requires a few simple steps. Rinsing only with water does little more than free harmful bacteria, making it easier for them to move from your hands. The

following steps are recommended for effective handwashing:

- wet hands in warm water
- apply soap to hands and lather vigorously for at least 20 seconds; pay particular attention to the fingertips, under the nails and between the fingers - a nail brush is recommended for these areas
- scrub hard as bacteria can hide and cling to the crevices of your fingerprints and under the fingernails
- rinse with warm water
- repeat these steps for a more effective wash, especially on very soiled hands

Is Water Necessary?

Yes! Some hand care products claim to be effective without washing or rinsing with warm water. Handwashing without water is not considered adequate to effectively remove soil, grease and bacteria/viruses. Hence, handwashing, regardless of the cleaning agent, should always been done "under the tap" with warm running water.

Should We Wash Our Hands?

Handwashing is an essential part of good personal hygiene and must be done after using the toilet, prior to preparing food, between handling uncooked foods and ready-to-eat foods, and before putting anything into your mouth.

Updated: January 2013

