Stop germs! Stay healthy! Wash your hands!

By Karen Quinnell, Laboratory Manager/Infection Prevention Coordinator

Germs are everywhere! They can get onto your hands and items you touch throughout the day. Washing hands with soap and water is the most important step in preventing the spread of disease-causing germs. Germs from unwashed hands may get into food during preparation and can sometimes make people sick. They can also be transferred to another person's hands by way of objects, such as door knobs, tables, or toys. They then unknowingly get into the body through our eyes, nose, and mouth and make us sick. Handwashing with soap and water removes germs from hands and helps prevent sickness. Studies have shown that handwashing helps prevent diarrhea-related sicknesses and respiratory infections, such as a cold or the flu.

You can use bar soap or liquid soap to wash your hands. Studies have not found any added health benefit from using soaps containing antibacterial ingredients when compared with plain soap. Both are equally effective in getting rid of germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Handwashing at any time of the day can help get rid of germs but it's most important to wash your hands at these key times:

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After using the bathroom, changing diapers, or cleaning up a child who has used the bathroom
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal, animal food or treats, animal cages, or animal feces (poop)
- After touching garbage
- If your hands are visibly dirty or greasy

For more information and a video demonstration of how to wash your hands, visit the CDC handwashing website: www.cdc.gov/handwashing

Prior Hospital Happenings available at http://www.fcphd.org/news.html.

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