

Wash Your Hands to Help Prevent Illness

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), keeping hands clean is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infection and illness.



In light of the current outbreak of H1N1 influenza virus (swine flu), consumers are being urged to take extra care to wash their hands to help prevent infection and illness. According to Barbara Ingham, food safety specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Extension, "Hand washing is a simple thing and it's the best way to prevent illness, whether dealing with the flu or other infectious diseases."

Ingham notes that proper hand washing can prevent infection and illness from spreading from family member to family member and, sometimes, throughout a community. In the home, the basic rule is to wash hands before preparing food and after handling uncooked meat and poultry, before eating, after changing diapers, after touching pets, after coughing, sneezing, or blowing one's nose into a tissue, and after using the bathroom.

According to the CDC, this virus is not spread through food. You can not get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills the swine flu virus as it does other harmful organisms.

The University of Wisconsin Extension recommends the following steps for proper hand washing:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if it is available.
- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands for 20 seconds, about the time it takes to sing the 'ABC' song.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel. If possible, use your paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Plain soap and clean water are best for hand washing, but if these are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub to clean your hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast-acting. When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply product to the palm of one hand.
- Rub hands together.
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

As with other influenza viruses, this new strain of the flu is spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people. Be sure to cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. And stay home if you get sick. The CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.