



Reducing the Spread of Infection: Hand Washing

Darlene Christensen, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

WHY WASH?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infection.” Washing hands correctly reduces the chances of spreading germs.

WHEN SHOULD I WASH?

Hands should be washed whenever they become contaminated.

Wash hands after:

- Coughing or sneezing (Use a clean tissue or clothing sleeve to cough or sneeze into. Do not cough or sneeze into hands.)
- Touching contaminated surfaces
- Using the restroom
- Changing diapers
- Handling garbage
- Handling uncooked foods such as meat
- Touching animals and pets
- Caring for a sick person

Wash hands before:

- Preparing or eating food
- Treating a wound or taking care of someone ill

WHAT IS THE “T ZONE”?

The “T Zone” refers to the mucus membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth. By touching these areas with a contaminated finger, disease is able to enter the body. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with fingers.

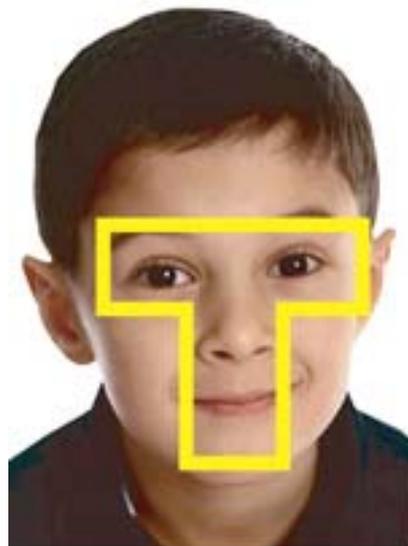


Photo source: www.henrythehand.com
(used with permission)

HOW DO I WASH MY HANDS?

Wet your hands with warm, running water.



Add soap and rub your hands together to make a soapy lather. Do this away from the running water so soap is not washed away. Wash the front and backs of hands, between fingers, nails, and wrists. Scrub for 15 to 20 seconds. Try singing the ABC song twice while washing.



Rinse hands under warm running water. Turn faucet off with a clean paper towel. (Remember the faucet was turned on with dirty hands.)



Dry hands thoroughly with a clean paper towel.



When leaving a bathroom with a closed door, use a paper towel to open the door. Then throw away the paper towel.



WHAT IF SOAP AND WATER ARE NOT AVAILABLE?

If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based product to clean hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast acting.

When using alcohol-based hand sanitizers, apply product to palm of one hand and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers, until hands are dry. Alcohol-based hand wipes can also be used.

REFERENCES

- Washington State University Fact Sheet: Hand washing and Disinfection: Reducing the Spread of Infection.
<http://www.ehs.wsu.edu/Factsheets/FAQHandwashing.asp>
- Henry the Hand Foundation. www.henrythehand.com.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Hand Hygiene Guidelines Fact Sheet.
<http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/pressrel/fs021025.htm>

Utah State University is committed to providing an environment free from harassment and other forms of illegal discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 and older), disability, and veteran's status. USU's policy also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment and academic related practices and decisions.

Utah State University employees and students cannot, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran's status, refuse to hire; discharge; promote; demote; terminate; discriminate in compensation; or discriminate regarding terms, privileges, or conditions of employment, against any person otherwise qualified. Employees and students also cannot discriminate in the classroom, residence halls, or in on/off campus, USU-sponsored events and activities.

This publication is issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Noelle E. Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.