

WASH YOUR HANDS! STOP COLDS & FLU – BEFORE COLDS & FLU STOP YOU!

WHO SHOULD WASH THEIR HANDS?

Everyone!

Hand washing is especially important during cold and flu season. Careful attention to washing hands throughout the day can prevent your older parent, other family members and yourself from coming down with colds and flu.

WHY HAND WASHING IS IMPORTANT

People of all ages come in contact every day with other people and places that carry a wide variety of bacteria, germs and viruses that cause colds, flu and other contagious illnesses. Older adults' immune systems may not be as strong as those of younger people. As a result they are at greater risk for coming down with flu or cold virus infections. These infections often lead to pneumonia and other serious illnesses in elderly people.

The good news is that frequent hand washing throughout the day can prevent older people – and their caregivers – from a bout with flu and spreading the disease to family members, friends, relatives and other people they come in contact with.

The flu can be prevented with flu virus vaccines administered early in the flu season. Because there are many varieties of cold viruses there is currently no vaccine or other medical treatments to prevent colds. Washing hands is a pleasant way to prevent colds that can be performed frequently.

WHEN TO WASH HANDS

Here is a list of everyday activities that should be followed up with a visit to the bathroom sink to lather up your parent's hands and rid him or her of flu-causing microbes:

- Whenever hands look like they need washing.
- Before and after eating.
- After using the toilet.
- After being around people with coughs, fever, aches and pains and other flu-like symptoms.
- After blowing his or her nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- After petting or playing with pets; cleaning up after pets.
- Playing with children – especially if they have runny noses or coughs.
- After touching garbage, trash or garbage cans.
- Before and after treating cuts, sores, scratches, or other minor wounds.
- Preparing food – especially raw meat, poultry, uncooked eggs.

WASH YOUR HANDS IN SEVEN EASY STEPS

Here's a short "refresher course" in hand-washing – a skill you and your older relative probably perfected when you both were very young and shortened the procedure as you grew older and busier.

1. Wet hands with warm, clean running water.
2. Apply soap.
3. Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds – the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday to You" song.
4. Scrub the tops of hands, between fingers and under fingernails.
5. Rinse hands in warm running water.
6. Dry hands on a clean paper or cloth towel.
7. If towels are not available, let hands air-dry.

REMEDIES FOR DRY SKIN

Dry skin is common in older people – especially in cold weather. Suggest that your parent apply fragrance-free creams or lotions to soften skin on the hands – especially at bedtime. If skin on the hands or feet becomes sore, cracked or irritated ask your parent's doctor to recommend other ointments that may be more effective.

ENJOY A GOOD HANDWASHING!

Good hand washing skills can reduce your parent's risk of catching a variety of disease-causing viruses, bacteria and other microbes by as much as 50%, according to the American Society for Microbiology and the American Cleaning Institute.

Hand washing can also make an enjoyable break in an older person's day and yours too. Washing hands is a great opportunity to cleanse and warm the hands, work in a quick manicure, and rub hands with soothing lotions to repair and prevent dry, cracked skin.

In many countries and faiths washing hands is an important ritual in many countries and faiths. Make it become a routine practice in your home too. Everyone will enjoy the benefits! [624-1/19/11]