



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Clean Hands, Healthy Body

Global Handwashing Day — October 15, 2012

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Eating well, exercising regularly, and getting checkups are all important for staying healthy, but forgetting the simple daily task of washing your hands with soap and water can result in severe illness.

Dr. Anna Bowen is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of regular hand washing. Welcome to the show, Anna.

[Dr. Bowen] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Anna, what illnesses can be associated with not washing our hands properly or regularly?

[Dr. Bowen] Hands are really good at transmitting germs, but thankfully, washing hands can prevent diarrheal illnesses and respiratory illnesses, including colds and pneumonia. Hand washing can also prevent certain types of skin infections.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is hand washing any more important when children are involved?

[Dr. Bowen] Yes, for two reasons. Number one, children are often more vulnerable to infectious diseases, and two, they are also better at spreading infectious diseases to others. So it's important for children to wash their own hands, ideally with the help of an adult, and for people caring for children to wash their hands carefully.

[Dr. Gaynes] When and how often should we wash our hands?

[Dr. Bowen] There's no set number of times that we recommend washing your hands each day, but rather, we prefer people think about the times and events during the day when they're more likely to transmit germs to themselves or to others. And these key times include when people are handling food – preparing meals, eating, feeding another person, such as a young child; and after toileting or changing a child's diaper. We also recommend washing hands after handling raw meats and raw vegetables and after handling pets or other animals or pet foods.

[Dr. Gaynes] Anna, what is the proper technique for hand washing?

[Dr. Bowen] We've all probably seen long lists of the proper steps, or recommend steps, for hand washing on different web sites or other documents, but I'd like to really boil it down to three key points.

Number 1 – Use soap. Washing hands with soap removes germs much better than washing hands with water alone.

Number 2 – Scrub all the surfaces of your hands, including under the fingernails where germs tend to hang out.

And Number 3 – Wash your hands for about 20 seconds, and that's about as long as it takes to sing the 'Happy Birthday' song twice.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is using hand sanitizer a good substitute for hand washing?

[Dr. Bowen] Hand sanitizers are a great addition to the hand cleansing arsenal. They're portable, they're quick, they're easy, and they've become really popular in the United States and other countries. However, they're not as good as hand washing with soap and water when hands are very soiled, and they're also not as effective against certain types of germs. Therefore, we recommend that people wash their hands with soap and water, at the key times, whenever they can, and to use hand sanitizers in addition to hand washing when soap and water or sinks are not available.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about proper hand washing?

[Dr. Bowen] Listeners can go to www.cdc.gov/handwashing, all one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Anna. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Anna Bowen about the importance of hand washing.

Remember, frequent, proper hand washing can prevent a substantial number of diarrheal and respiratory illnesses. Using soap is especially important because it removes germs better than washing your hands with plain water.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.