



For the week of
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Editor:

This column was reviewed by Lydia Medeiros, associate professor of human nutrition and Ohio State University Extension food safety specialist in the College of Human Ecology. Medeiros was lead author of the Journal of the American Dietetic Association study mentioned in the column.

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Washing hands can make you feel good

How can I convince my teenager to wash his hands before he eats?

Convincing teenagers of anything can be challenging, to say the least. But you might have a good chance of success if you present him with cold, hard facts.

We've known for 150 years that hand washing can help prevent the spread of illness, but even more persuasive evidence has accumulated just recently.

According to a study published in the November 2001 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, food safety researchers have determined that hand-washing is the No. 1 way to prevent the spread of food-borne disease, especially Norwalk and Norwalk-like viruses, as well as E. coli O157:H7 and bugs called Shigella and Hepatitis A.

Norwalk viruses aren't well known, partly because they were thought to be relatively rare until just a couple of years ago. Then, a 1999 report in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases* estimated the incidence at about 9 million cases a year, making them the cause of two-thirds of all food-borne illnesses. Fortunately, the illness caused by the viruses is usually mild. Unfortunately, the viruses appear to be infective at

very low doses, with illness marked by sudden vomiting and diarrhea. Washing your hands before handling any sort of food can help prevent the spread of this disease.

In addition, the August 2001 issue of the *Journal of Preventive Medicine* reported that "Operation Stop Cough" at the Navy's Great Lakes Recruit Training Command Center in Illinois reduced rates of respiratory ailments by 45 percent. During the two-year program, commanding officers instructed recruits to wash their hands at least five times a day.

To wash your hands most effectively:

- Use warm, running water. It works with the oils in your skin to help dirt and bacteria wash away.
- Make sure soap gets between fingers and up to your wrists.
- It's usually recommended to wash hands for at least 20 seconds, but that's not really a "magic number." What you want to do is make sure you give the soap and water enough time not to kill bacteria and other pathogens, but to make sure they wash off your hands and down the drain.

Chow Line is a service of The Ohio State University. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.