

The “Secret Weapon” in Preventing Many Infections

(NAPSA)—It is so obvious, but it really works. Hand washing, when done correctly, is the simplest, most effective way to prevent the spread of infections.

“Good” hand washing techniques include using soap and warm water and washing for a minimum of 10 seconds. This is particularly important for children. To help children wash long enough, some suggest singing a short song, such as “Happy Birthday” to hold their interest.

“It sounds so easy, but most people, especially children, don’t wash their hands as much as they should,” according to Nancy S. Miller, MD, FCAP, a pathologist in Boston. “Yet it helps to substantially reduce the risk of illness.”

Some of the most common ways to “catch” germs is from hand-to-hand contact or by sharing items like food utensils, straws etc. If your hands have germs on them, and you touch your face, for example, those germs can take hold and start an infection. It is especially important to wash your hands after:

- using the washroom,
- changing diapers,
- eating or handling food,
- touching raw meat, poultry or fish,
- handling garbage,
- visiting sick people, and
- handling infected animals.

“Good hand washing is your first line of defense against the spread of many viral and bacterial illnesses such as meningitis, bronchiolitis, influenza, hepatitis A, and most types of infectious diarrhea,” says Dr. Miller.

In addition to washing hands, other traditional preventive mea-



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asures to keep your family healthy and free from illnesses caused by germs include:

- Thoroughly cleaning countertops and cutting boards with a bleach-and-water solution.
- Cleaning sponges and dish-towels often.
- Soaking sponges in a bleach-and-water solution or running them through the dishwasher.

“When it comes to reducing the risk of infection related to food preparation, it is really important to wash kitchen counters and utensils, especially any that have come in contact with raw food, particularly raw meat,” according to Dr. Miller. “Frequent washing and replacing of sponges and dishcloths also helps reduce the spread of germs. An even better idea: whenever possible, use disposable paper towels instead of sponges and cloths. And always wash your hands before and after handling food.”

For more information about hand washing and how to prevent disease, visit the College of American Pathologists at www.cap.org.