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THE IMPORTANCE OF WASHING YOUR HANDS

Clover Safe notes are intended primarily for 4-H volunteers and members nine years and older.



Hand washing is one of the most effective methods for preventing infections and the spread of disease. Hands may be contaminated by germs that can be transferred to cause illnesses such as the common cold, influenza, infectious diarrhea, hepatitis A, giardiasis, and enterovirus. Proper hand washing removes pathogens from the surface of your hands and helps prevent the transfer of infection- and disease-causing germs. This Clover Safe note provides information about when to wash your hands and proper hand-washing techniques.

When to Wash Hands

- After using the toilet or changing a diaper.
- Before and after eating food.
- Before preparing food and after touching any uncooked meats.
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing into your hands.
- Before brushing your teeth.
- After touching an animal or handling animal toys, leashes, halters, saddles, or waste, including bedding materials.
- After handling garbage.
- Before and after treating an open wound.
- Before putting in or removing contact lenses.
- Whenever your hands are dirty from performing a task.
- After your hands have been exposed to untreated and potentially contaminated water from streams, ponds, etc.

Proper Hand-Washing Techniques

- Always wet your hands with clean, warm, running water followed by the application of soap, whether in the form of a liquid, powder, or bar.
- Rub your hands together to produce plentiful lather and scrub all of your hands, including between the fingers and under nails.
- Continue rubbing your hands together for at least 20 seconds or for the time it takes to sing the "A, B, Cs."
- Thoroughly rinse your hands under running water. Avoid allowing rinse water to run down your forearms to the elbows.
- Dry your hands using a single use towel or air dryer.
- If possible, turn off the faucet with a paper towel.
- Dispose of paper towels in the trash receptacle.
- Only use a hand sanitizer when hand washing is not an option. When using a hand sanitizer:
 - Make sure the sanitizer includes at least 60% alcohol as an ingredient.
 - Place the sanitizer in one hand in the amount given on the label.
 - Begin rubbing both hands together while completely coating the surface of each hand with the sanitizer.
 - Continue rubbing your hands together until your hands and fingers are dry.