



Healthy Hand Hygiene

Your health is important.

Because the Youens and Duchicela Clinic believes this, the following is brought to you in an effort to provide wellness information that you can use to help manage and maintain your health.

This week, the focus is on good hand hygiene, including the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

With the heightened public attention this cold and flu season, individuals are giving greater thought to personal hygiene in order to prevent the spread of infection. According to the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene (IFH), hands are one of the most frequent transmission routes for infections; therefore, practicing healthy hand hygiene is essential.

The IFH recommends that individuals decontaminate their hands routinely throughout the day and especially in the following instances:

- immediately after handling raw food (eg. chicken, raw meat)
- before preparing and handling cooked/ready-to-eat food
- before eating food or feeding children
- after contact with contaminated surfaces (eg. rubbish bins, cleaning cloths, food contaminated surfaces)
- after handling pets and domestic animals
- after wiping or blowing the nose or sneezing into the hands
- after handling soiled tissues (self or others', eg. children)
- after contact with blood or body fluids (eg. vomit and others)
- before and after dressing wounds
- before giving care to an "at-risk" person



- after giving care to an infected person
- after using the toilet (or disposing of human or animal feces)
- and after changing a baby's diaper and disposing of the feces.

To remove most bacteria, a minimum of a 15-second hand-scrubbing time with soap and warm water is recommended. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be substituted. Alternately, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be applied AFTER washing hands with soap and water for added cleanliness.

An alcohol-based hand sanitizer is a formulation of either ethanol 1-propanol or 2-propanol or a combination of these products. They work because they release bacteria from hands in much the same way that traditional soap and water washing does.

Although products containing 60% to 95% alcohol are most effective, higher concentrations are less effective, according to a 2007 study by the IFH. Most hand sanitizers available on the market—such as the popular brand Purell—do fall within this category.

When alcohol-based sanitizers are applied, they work best when the action of hand washing is mimicked; in other words, individuals should liberally apply the sanitizer (at least 1/2 teaspoon) and rub all over hands and nails, just as one would do in the case of washing with soap and water.

Parents should be use caution, though, in allowing their children to use alcohol-based hand sanitizers—especially those with fun, fruity scents—so that inadvertent ingestion of the liquid does not occur.

Remember that good hand hygiene is one added defense against a number of harmful bacteria and should be incorporated into everyone's daily routine this cold and flu season.

The information provided here is not to be used as a substitute for medical attention. Remember that, should you have specific medical questions or desire more information, contact your doctor.