



# HEALTH AWARENESS

## Stay Healthy This Winter: Wash Those Hands

by John Heinze, Ph.D.

(NAPSA)—When it comes to staying healthy, mother knew best. Countless studies prove that handwashing is one of the easiest and most effective ways of preventing disease.

Washing your hands frequently not only protects your health, but also helps to protect the health of everyone close to you—your children and other family members, friends and colleagues.

At this time of year, diseases that spread through hand-to-hand or hand-to-object contact include the common cold, flu and several intestinal disorders, such as infectious diarrhea or norovirus. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control—which stresses the importance of handwashing—estimates that 23 million Americans contract norovirus each year, particularly in the winter months.

If you don't wash your hands enough, you can infect yourself with these germs by simply touching your eyes, nose or mouth—and you can spread these germs to others by simply touching them, or touching surfaces they also touch, from computer keyboards to door handles. And remember, others can do the same to you.

Common sense tells us that it is impossible to keep our bare hands free of germs all the time. But there are times when it is especially critical to wash your hands to limit the transfer of bacteria and viruses.

According to the Mayo Clinic and other medical authorities, these include:

- Before and after preparing food, especially if handling raw meat, poultry or fish;
- Before eating;
- After blowing your nose or coughing or sneezing into your hands;



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- Before inserting or removing contact lenses;
- After using the toilet, especially in public restrooms.

You can probably think of other occasions—for example, the many things and people you touch when traveling this winter, whether to an exotic vacation destination or to visit with family and friends.

How do you wash your hands enough to provide protection?

Make sure you wash your hands vigorously, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails. Lather well and use warm running water whenever possible. It should take at least 15-20 seconds.

Yes, washing your hands is very simple and costs practically nothing. Yet it is still amazingly effective in preventing disease. Please help spread the word. And listen to your mother's advice on handwashing—no matter your age.

*John Heinze, executive director of the Environmental Health Research Foundation, received his doctorate in microbiology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*