Ginny Heffelmire 9-18-09

Antibacterial Soap is Not Enough!

There have been many questions about antibacterial soap and its effectiveness. When thinking of how to protect yourself from bacteria, antibacterial soap may do the trick till you can get your hands washed, but be aware that antibacterial soap is NOT going to kill the H1N1 virus. As the name of the soap denotes it is antibacterial which will kill bacteria not viruses.

There are many different bacteria, and viruses that can present a problem to humans. They are found in soil, water, air, in food, plants or animals. It is important to recognize that there is a way to help protect yourself and others from these microorganisms. Microorganisms are spread everyday by humans sneezing, coughing, being sick or having poor hygiene. Germs are everywhere! (Think about the door knob next time you touch it. How many other people have touched it before you?)

You do have some good bacteria, but then there is the bad bacterium that makes you ill. Bacteria are extremely tiny one celled organisms that are self sufficient and multiply rapidly but are only visible by a microscope. They are so tiny that one thousand of them could line up and still fit across the tip of a pencil eraser! But not all bacteria are harmful. Only about 1% causes disease. The good bacterium resides in your intestines and helps you digest food, and destroy disease causing organisms. The infectious or bad bacteria can reproduce rapidly and produce toxins, which make you feel ill. Examples of contagious bacterial infections would be strep throat, diphtheria, or tuberculosis. A non contagious bacterial infection would include anthrax, an infection of the heart valves or bone infections. There are numerous strains of bacteria to long to list.

Viruses, on the other hand, have an ability to reproduce but aren't self sufficient. They need a suitable host to thrive on. After the virus achieves what it needs for reproduction, it then kills your healthy cells, thus making you feel ill. Examples of viral infections that are not contagious are West Nile, dengue fever, or yellow fever. A contagious viral

infection would include influenza, H1N1, measles, or the common cold. Again the list is quite long.

In most instances, there are treatments for these illnesses. If one attracts a bacterial infection, you can be prescribed antibiotics. Viruses can be prevented in most cases by vaccines, or anti viral medicine. When the H1N1 vaccine is ready it will be given in order of greatest risk. According to the CDC:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- Persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old
- People ages of 25 through 64 years of age who are at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

will be offered the vaccine. When it is time to be vaccinated, notification will be the radio and community newspaper. The beginning of shipment will be the end of October.

But the most important thing we as humans can do is use common sense and wash our hands to protect us from, bacterial, viral or parasitic illnesses. Remember to wash your hands after:

Using the bathroom
Changing a baby
Touching pets
Gardening
After sneezing or coughing

Throughout the day wash your hands often with soap and warm water for about 20 seconds, rinse thoroughly then dry with a disposable towel. If you cannot wash your hands, use a hand sanitizer, especially during flu season. Be aware that there could be germs on everything you touch, so get rid of them! Teach your children good hygiene habits.

Our best defense against many things is implementing **good hand washing**. As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov