

OUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

There are many different bacteria or viruses that can present a problem to individuals young and old. They can be found in soil, water, air, in food, plants or animals. Microorganisms are spread everyday by individuals by 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? And where have their hands been?)

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. 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, salmonella, shigellosis, E. Coli or tuberculosis to name a few. Our best defense against bacteria is GOOD hand washing techniques for yourself and your children. Some illnesses are passed from the fecal-oral route, meaning that someone who is infected doesn't wash his/her hands after using the bathroom and touches something thus contaminating it and it is then somehow ingested by another person with the result often in one becoming ill.

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 could include influenza, measles, or the common cold among others.

But the most important thing we as individuals can do is use common sense and WASH our hands to protect us from, bacterial or viral illnesses and be sure to teach your children how to properly wash their hands also.

Remember to wash your hands after:

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

A person should wash their hands throughout the day with soap and warm water for about 15-20 seconds, rinse thoroughly then dry with a disposable towel. If you cannot wash your hands, use an alcohol based hand sanitizer, at least 60% alcohol, 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; this is very important when they are in school. Be good role models.

Also remember when preparing food to wash all raw vegetables before eating. When preparing food use good hygiene and cook your food thoroughly before eating. Remember even improper preparation of food can make an individual ill.

Our best and first line of defense against many illnesses is implementing **good hand washing techniques** for you and your family! Thus far this is the best defense we have against harmful bacteria. As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov