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News Release

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Simple And Effective Health Tip Helps Reduce Illnesses

(Clearfield, Utah) – Health officials promote a simple and effective way to reduce and even prevent the spread of many illnesses. Though it's not a miracle cure, it is inexpensive and easily within the reach of most everyone. It's hand washing.

“Frequently overlooked by a busy or forgetful public, hand washing is a habit we should all develop and continue,” said Wendy Garcia, director of Davis County Health Department’s Communicable Disease and Epidemiology Division. “By far, hand washing is just as important to our overall health as other hygienic habits we have in our lives such as brushing our teeth.”

“Cleaning your hands gets rid of germs you pick up from other people, from the surfaces you touch, and from the animals you come in contact with,” said Sarah Willardson, Epidemiologist for the county health department. “Studies show hand washing reduces the number of people who get sick with diarrhea by 31 percent and the number of respiratory illnesses, like the common cold, by 21 percent.”

Garcia said, “It’s essential to wash hands anytime they get dirty, but particularly before cooking, eating, feeding others as well as after using the toilet, changing a diaper, handling pets, or coughing and sneezing.”

According to Willardson, the most effective way to get clean, germ-free hands is by following these steps:

- **Wet** hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- **Lather** hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails.

-MORE-

Page 2 of 2 – Simple And Effective Health Tip Helps Reduce Illnesses

- **Scrub** hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- **Rinse** hands well under clean, running water.
- **Dry** hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

If soap and water aren't available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol should be used to clean hands, said Willardson. These sanitizers are not as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy.

“With many diseases circulating around the community, hand washing gives everyone the opportunity to take an active role in their own health,” Garcia said.

This message is provided by Utah's public health departments.

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