

For more information about this topic, call the Risk Management Division:

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This fact sheet provides information on how to use good personal hygiene practices as a means to help control or minimize the spread of a possible pandemic virus among individuals and in the community.

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### **Background**

A severe pandemic (defined as a worldwide epidemic) in a vulnerable population, such as the 1918 flu pandemic, represents a worst-case scenario for pandemic planning and preparedness. Communities, individuals, employers, schools, and other organizations are being asked to plan for the use of interventions that will help limit the spread of disease. At this time, there is concern because of continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) virus among animals in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe that has the potential to significantly threaten human health. If a virus such as H5N1 mutates and spreads easily from one person to another, avian influenza may break out globally. While there are no reports of *sustained* human-to-human transmission of avian influenza, governments and international health agencies are preparing for a possible pandemic. A pandemic can originate from any unknown source, such as the H5N1 virus.

### **Personal Hygiene Basics**

The best way to stop the spread of germs that cause the flu or other illnesses that can be spread from one person to another is to wash hands often and control the discharges associated with coughing and sneezing. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Prevention, "*Hand washing is the single most important means of preventing the spread of infection.*"

Hands should be washed with clean water and soap:

- When they are dirty
- After using the restroom
- Before and after preparing meals
- After cutting and handling uncooked meat
- Before eating
- After cleaning the house
- After caring for someone who is ill
- After changing an infant's diaper
- After cleaning up blood or body fluids
- After handling soiled bed linens and clothes
- Before and after flossing teeth
- After you cough or sneeze in them



## How to Wash Hands



1. Adjust water to a comfortable level and wet hands. Dispense a small amount of soap into the palms of the hands creating lather.
2. Using as much friction as needed, thoroughly clean all surfaces of hands including between the fingers.
3. Pay attention to the nails and nail beds by rubbing the nails of one hand across the palm of the other, creating enough friction to clean underneath the nails. Hands should be washed for at least 20 seconds. Use of a memory aid, such as singing a song or reciting a familiar poem, may assist individuals in washing for an adequate period of time.
4. Rinse the hands under running water, being sure to hold the hands in a downward position.
5. Use paper towels to thoroughly dry the hands.
6. Using the same paper towel, turn off the water supply and open the door.

## Other Hand Cleaning Options

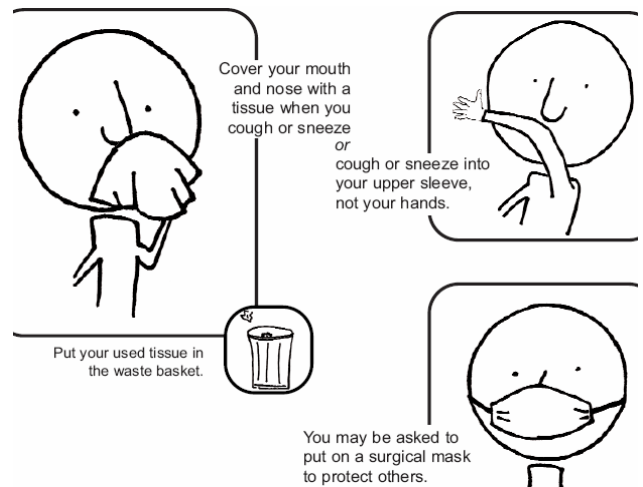
Alcohol-based hand cleaners can also be used to clean hands. Put a small amount on the hands and rub all hand surfaces until the hands are dry.

If commercially prepared alcohol-based hand cleaners are not available or are too costly, an alcohol-based hand cleaner can be made by mixing 70% alcohol and glycerin (about 2% by volume of glycerin). The glycerin keeps the hands soft because the alcohol can dry them out. Hands will periodically need to be washed with soap and water because the hands will have a glycerin buildup with time.

## Cough and Sneeze Etiquette

The following measures to contain respiratory secretions are recommended for all individuals with signs and symptoms of a respiratory infection.

- Cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Provide and encourage use of tissues to contain respiratory secretions. If possible, dispose of tissues immediately in the nearest no-touch waste receptacle after use.
- If tissues are unavailable, cough or sneeze into a handkerchief or your arm or shoulder, not your hands.
- If you cough or sneeze in your hands, be sure to wash or clean them with an alcohol-based hand cleaner as soon as possible to stop the spread of germs.



## **References**

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