

### DECEMBER IS FLU PREVENTION MONTH

#### IS IT A COLD OR IS IT THE FLU?

Many people wonder what the difference is between a cold and the flu. The flu and the cold are both respiratory illness but are caused by different kinds of viruses. Both can cause similar flu-like symptoms and it may be difficult to tell them apart. The flu is typically worse than the common cold and can include body aches, fever, extreme tiredness, and a dry cough. People with colds might have a runny or stuffy nose, whereas the flu may lead to pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. The flu usually first appears in the late fall or early winter in the United States and can be spread from a sick person to others by sneezing or coughing. Typically in Iowa, the first confirmed case of the flu is seen in the first week of December, although this year the first case was confirmed on November 14. Usually an individual will start to show symptoms within one to five days after exposure and most times it lasts for two to seven days.



#### WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO STAY WELL?

**HAND WASHING** is the single best way to stay well! Proper hand washing keeps germs off of your hands and objects that you touch. This in turn will work to protect you and others from illnesses.



#### THE FLU CAN BE PREVENTED!



Remember hand washing is the best way to prevent illnesses, including the flu. It is also important to practice good health habits such as avoiding people who are sick, staying home when you are sick, covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

**On average, 5 to 20% of the population in the United States gets the flu each year.**

It is recommended that everyone get the flu shot each year; however some people are at risk for developing severe illness or complications from the flu and are strongly encouraged to get the flu shot each year. The flu shot works by increasing the number of antibodies in the body which in turn protect you from the flu virus. It is important to get vaccinated each year since the flu virus changes so what you were vaccinated against last year may not protect you from this year's strain of the virus. It is possible to get the flu more than once during your lifetime. If you do happen to get the flu, try to get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids.



# HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS

Here are the steps to washing your hands properly:

1. Wet your hands in warm water.
2. Add soap to your hands.
3. Rub your hands together and between your fingers for about 20 seconds or the amount of time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice.
4. Rinse your hands.
5. Dry your hands with either a paper towel or a clean towel.
6. You're done! If possible, use the towel to turn the water off and to open the door to leave.



## WHEN TO WASH YOUR HANDS

It is important to wash your hands AFTER:

- Going to the bathroom
- Blowing your nose
- Coughing or Sneezing
- Changing a diaper
- Touching a pet or animal
- Taking out the garbage
- Handling anything dirty
- Being around someone who is ill
- Touching a cut, sore, or burn



Wash your hands BEFORE:

- Handling food
- Eating
- Treating a cut, wound, or scrape
- Taking care of someone who is ill
- Putting in or taking out contact lenses



## WATER VS. HAND SANITIZERS



Many people wonder if hand sanitizers are better than water at getting rid of germs. Both are good at keeping germs from sticking to hands. Hand sanitizer should not be a replacement for water. It should only be used when water is not available. If soap is available, it should be used with the water. Oils are naturally produced on your skin and germs can stick to this oil. The soap helps to break down the oil, which in turn makes it harder for germs to stick to your hands. The hand sanitizer will greatly reduce the number of germs on the skin and it is fast-acting. It is a good idea to carry a hand sanitizer with you in case you are in a situation where you need to wash your hands and water is not available.

### RESOURCES:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

[www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

Iowa Department of Public Health:

[www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/flu.asp](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/flu.asp)

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