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F O R U M

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Prevent Disease, Save Lives: Wash Your Hands!

“Clean Hands Save Lives!” More than just the name of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Clean Hands Campaign, this sentence conveys an elemental truth. The CDC reports that healthcare professionals generally cite handwashing as the single most important way to prevent the spread of disease.

HOW DISEASE IS SPREAD BY OUR HANDS

The urgency of handwashing is not just to prevent the spread of illness from one person to another, although that is part of its importance. The CDC describes some of the most common ways that diseases can be transmitted by hands:

***Hands to Food:** When food is prepared with unclean hands, the germs from that person’s hands can contaminate the food. An especially common scenario of disease being transmitted from hands to food is when the person handling the food does not thoroughly wash his or her hands after using the toilet, with those germs then being ingested by those

eating the food.

*** Food to Hands to Food:** Raw and uncooked foods contain many germs. If these are transmitted to the food preparer’s hands, he or she can then contaminate other food being prepared. For example, the germs contacted when cutting up raw meat can then be transferred to foods being handled afterward, such as bread being placed on a plate or raw vegetables being sliced for a fresh salad.

***Food to Hands to Person:** The CDC cites the example of germs being transmitted from food to hands to infants, but this same principle applies to adults as well. The person preparing food may come in contact with germs when handling uncooked foods, such as cutting up raw chicken. The germs from that raw food can be transferred from the staff member’s hands to the next resident or any other person with whom he or she has contact.

These methods by which foodborne illness can

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