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.

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 asked to prepare and plan for the use of interventions that will help limit the spread of disease. Pandemic concerns have escalated due to the more recent impacts of disease outbreaks such as the SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV) in 2002, pandemic H1N1 in 2009, MERS coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in 2012, and novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in 2019. Future disease outbreaks are likely, but difficult for scientists to predict.

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 encourage voluntary isolation by staying home when ill. Infected individuals should control discharges associated with coughing and sneezing. Healthy individuals should wash their hands often and avoid contact with infected people. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Handwashing 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 coughing or sneezing into hands.

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 Primary 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, as 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 over time.

Cough 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 into your arm or shoulder, not your hands.
• If you cough or sneeze into 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


For more information about this topic, call the Risk Management Division:
• 1-801-240-4049
• 1-800-453-3860, ext. 2-4049 (toll free in the United States and Canada)