

Fight Germs with Handwashing

Clara Misenhelter - Nutrition, Food and Health Agent
December 2023

K-STATE | Southwind District
Research and Extension

As we enter the peak of flu season, it is important to remember the importance of one of the easiest and most effective ways to protect yourself from getting sick: handwashing. I am currently traveling to schools throughout the four counties served by K-State Research and Extension in the Southwind Extension District (which includes Allen, Bourbon, Neosho, and Woodson Counties) to provide a handwashing school enrichment lesson to first-grade students. As part of this activity, youth put lotion on their hands and look at their hands under a blacklight. Like germs, the lotion is invisible to the naked eye. However, the lotion lights up brightly underneath the blacklight. Youth are then instructed to wash their hands and look at them again underneath the blacklight to reveal the spots they missed. I have yet to have a single student get their hands completely clean the first time. This hands-on activity is an excellent reminder for youth about the importance of handwashing, but taking the time to wash hands properly is important for all of us.



So, what are the proper handwashing steps? The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists the following five steps:

1. Wet
2. Get Soap
3. Scrub
4. Rinse
5. Dry

While these steps seem simple, there are a few more items to keep in mind. First, after you wet your hands with water (which can be either warm or cold), you should turn off the tap before getting soap. Lather all surfaces of your hands with the soap. You should scrub your hands for as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice. (Practicing this has been a favorite in the first-grade classrooms I’ve visited!) To learn more about the science behind these proper handwashing steps, visit bit.ly/handwashingscience.

For more information, please contact me at clarawicoff@ksu.edu or 620-365-2242. To receive the “Wellness For You and Community, Too!” e-newsletter published monthly by the Southwind District, visit bit.ly/southwindnews.