



Sarasota County Health Department | Florida Department of Health
scgov.net | 941-861-5000 | Comcast 19/Verizon 32

Feb. 3, 2011

Media contact: Dianne Shipley, 941-861-2852; cell 941-302-1058;
Dianne_Shipley@doh.state.fl.us

Wash hands and cover coughs to prevent spread of flu

The peak time for flu-like illness is expected to occur later this month. While getting vaccinated is the best defense against seasonal flu viruses, local health officials are also urging people of all ages to wash hands often, and cover your mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow when you cough and sneeze.

Health officials attribute the adoption of good hand washing and cough etiquette in part to the limited impact that the H1N1 flu virus had on our community during the 2009 pandemic.

“We can’t afford to let our guard down,” said Dr. William Heymann, medical director for the Sarasota County Health Department. “Hand washing is the single most important action that individuals can take to avoid getting sick and spreading disease to others.”

Hand washing is easy and anyone -- even children -- can do this with some instruction:

- Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- If soap and water is not available, use alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- When hand gels are used, rub hands together for 20 seconds, covering all surfaces and fingers, especially thumbs, which often get forgotten.
- Teach children to say their ABCs once or the “Happy Birthday” song twice as they wash their hands.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

“You can also cough into your upper sleeve or the inside of your elbow,” said Linda Glover, a registered nurse and school health supervisor with the Sarasota County Health Department. “Three important things are that you not use your hand to cover your cough or sneeze, dispose of used tissues in a trash can, and then wash your hands.”

Individuals, businesses, schools and civic organizations are encouraged to join the [Clean Hands Campaign](#). To date, over 300 organizations in the region have registered. Those who join also agree to make hand washing easy and assessable for visitors, customers/members and/or employees at entry and exit points in their facility.

Campaign materials include free Clean Hands signs, hand-sanitizing pens, clings for mirrors and windows and other reminders designed to reinforce hand hygiene in restrooms.

The [Community Health Improvement Partnership \(CHIP\)](#) spearheaded this regional initiative in 2009 through its Health Provocateur Project, which includes the CEOs of every hospital and health department in the tri-county region. This dedicated group has been collaborating to improve health in the region. The CHIP program is a community-based initiative to improve the health of Charlotte, DeSoto and Sarasota county residents. Recently, Manatee County joined in the partnership. The program is supported by foundations, businesses and other local organizations.

For more information on the CHIP program or to register to become part of the Clean Hands Campaign, call 941-861-2987 or visit the Clean Hands Campaign website at www.cleanhandscampaign.org.

-end-