

## The Lost Art of Handwashing

*Your health is in your hands - literally.*



Despite the incredible advancement of technology that characterizes our modern day society, there is still one thing that stands out as the most effective method of infection control ever devised. Since the days of blood-letting and leeching, old-fashioned handwashing has been discovered to be the single most important method of prevention and control.

Yet, in the United States, the Centres of Disease Control in Atlanta determined infections acquired during hospitalization will affect more than two million people and 20,000 of them will die - every year. More than a third of those infections can be prevented without sophisticated technology, simply by proper handwashing following contact with each patient.

At home, on the job, at school, in restaurants, that philosophy holds true as well. "Wash your hands after you use the toilet. Wash your hands before dinner. Wash your hands after you sneeze. Don't put your fingers in your mouth." - These and other

lessons ring in our ears in a voice that sounds suspiciously like mom's. But ... fewer of us are listening to that voice. In the twelve years from 1980 to 1992, there was a 58 percent increase in infectious diseases, and infectious diseases rose from fifth to the third leading killer.

Hands come into contact with millions of organisms in a day, many of them with the potential for infection. "If people increase the number of times they wash their hands, they can definitely decrease the number of infections they get," says Jane Tooze, Director of Infection Control at the Ajax-Pickering General Hospital. "The hands are what carry the germs; to prevent colds, wash your hands."

This becomes even more important in areas where there are many people and the potential for transmission is greater, such as in daycare centres or where food is being prepared for the consumption of others.

It sounds simple. And it is.

There are two types of organisms found on the skin: resident and transient. Resident organisms live on the skin, growing and mul-

tiplying but rarely causing infections... They generally require oxygen to survive and are not easily washed off.

Transient organisms are the opposite. They survive less than 24 hours on the skin, can easily be removed by scrubbing and cannot survive long in the presence of oxygen. It is these organisms which can readily cause infection in the body if not washed away through vigorous hand washing.

"The keys to good hand washing are an adequate amount of soap, good friction and running water," says Tooze. "Do not use too much soap. One pump of soap is usually plenty. Bar soap went out a long time ago. It tends to sit and develop a scum where it can grow bacteria." Even when using liquid soap, be aware that topping up a container is not a good idea unless the dispenser is completely emptied, cleaned out and then refilled. Better still, buy a new one, Tooze suggests.

*This article was extracted in part from "The lost art of handwashing" printed in This Week, Sunday Edition, Sunday, October 27, 1996, by Deb Bodine.*



### WI Special Exhibit at the Wellington Co. Museum

Members from this District gathered at the Wellington County Museum (between Fergus and Elora) for the opening of a special exhibit honouring the achievements of the Women's Institutes. "I read Linda Ambrose's new book twice," said Curator Susan Dunlop. "I was amazed at the involvement of the WIs who worked so hard to improve our communities, improvements that I had taken for granted. Not any more. I know that this Museum and its collections were begun because of the diligence and fund raising of the County Women's Institutes."

One gallery is set up as a 1910 Institute meeting in a rural dining room; the "women" (mannequins) are learning about proper housekeeping methods. Marg Atkin, Wellington Centre District President, is pictured at left in the gallery among "the ladies." Another gallery is filled with photographs and memorabilia, which focus on the beginnings, the war effort in WWI and WWII, the Institutes as social reformers and fund raisers, and how the WI has reached out beyond our borders.

Submitted by Susan Dunlop, Curator, Wellington County Museum.