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Putting Good Health in Your Hands

What can you do for less than five minutes each day to protect your health and your loved ones? Here’s a hint: your mother would approve.

If you guessed hand-washing, give yourself a clean pat on the back. Washing your hands regularly can reduce your risk of head and chest colds by 35–50% and gut infections by up to 80%. CTAHR is targeting this message to two groups whose hand-washing practices can make important impacts: food handlers and grade-schoolers.

An estimated 76 million cases of food-borne disease occur each year in the United States. Most are mild, but some are very serious, causing 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths annually. To prevent transmission of food-borne diseases at food service establishments, CTAHR’s Jim Hollyer, Dennis Miyahara, Lynn Nakamura-Tengan, and Aurora Saulo teamed with state agencies and professional organizations to develop an illustrated sticker that gives hand-washing instructions in 14 languages. Copies of the sticker are available through the Sanitation Branch of the Hawai‘i Department of Health.

Bringing the clean-hands message to kids requires a different tactic. “Germ City: Clean Hands, Healthy People” makes the benefits of hand-washing visible—and fun. A UV-sensitive lotion, representing germs, is applied to children’s hands. They enter a lightproof tunnel to see the “germs” glow under black light, then compare germ levels before and after hand-washing to learn which areas they missed.

Working with other Extension faculty and volunteers, Nakamura-Tengan has brought Germ City to more than 3,700 enthusiastic participants at schools, fairs, and festivals on Maui, the Big Island, Kaua‘i, and O‘ahu. Kids and adults alike reported more frequent, thorough hand-washing after visiting Germ City, and that means fewer sick days for Hawai‘i.