Article of the Week 3

Read through the article, making notes in the margin as you read. Then answer the questions at the bottom on a separate sheet of paper. Your response needs to be a full page.

Are you washing your hands all wrong?
It's the most basic part of your hygiene routine, but only one in six people do it right

By Ali Eaves

Before you laugh at the idea of a whole article about how to wash your hands, consider this: About 85 percent of people are doing it wrong, according to researchers from the University of Arizona.

If you don't scrub properly, your risk for getting sick skyrocket. "Hand washing is one of the most--if not the most--important ways to protect yourself from infections," says Yves Longtin, M.D., FRCP, an associate professor at Quebec's Universite Laval. "Most infections are acquired by touching other people, animals, or surfaces that harbor harmful microbes. Then we contaminate the food we ingest or contaminate our faces when we touch them."

Washing up requires a little more than simply slathering on soap and water. Follow these guidelines to keep your hands squeaky clean--and your body infection-free.

1. When should you wash up?

Every single time you use the bathroom, for starters--even if you steer clear of the stall. (Only 59 percent of guys hit the sink after using a urinal, according to new research from Christopher Newport University.)

Scrub up before you eat or prepare food, and after you cook--raw produce and meat are major germ hotspots, says Charles Gerba, Ph.D, a professor of microbiology at Arizona. It's also a good practice to wash your hands every time you come home, Schaffner says. And of course, rinse after touching anything especially dirty, like when you take out the trash, pet your dog, or come in contact with unsanitary items.

2. What kind of water should you use?

You may have been told that you should wash your hands in hot water to kill germs. Not true, says Schaffner. You'll scald yourself before you could ever get the H2O hot enough to actually banish bacteria.
There’s no difference between cold and tolerably hot water when it comes to eliminating germs, he says. So just use a temperature that's comfortable for you.

3. How about soap?

Uh, use it! It sounds obvious, but 50 percent of people don't bother with the crucial washing ingredient, Gerba says. Soap lifts bacteria off your skin and carries it away, and dissolves things on your hands that water can't, Schaffner says. As for what kind to use, a new Rutgers study found that antibacterial soap did a better job at eliminating a germ that causes dysentery from people's hands than the regular stuff. Based on this new study and other research, Schaffner says there is a clear benefit to going antibacterial—especially when there's a good chance you have harmful germs on your hands, like after handling raw chicken or changing a diaper. If you're not sure what type public restrooms use, keep a hand sanitizer in your pocket to slap on after washing.

4. How should you lather?

A simple wipe won't do. Really rub your hands together, Schaffner advises. The friction helps clean in the deeper grooves of your skin where bacteria may be hiding. Remember to hit the backs of your hands and in between your fingers. Microbes are highly concentrated under your nails, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), so rub your fingertips into the palm of your other hand to scrub underneath them.

5. How long should you wash?

Many guys skip scrubbing because it seemingly lasts forever. "It takes more time to wash my hands than it does to go to the bathroom!" Gerba says. But the CDC recommends washing for just 20 seconds, which ensures you do a thorough job. If you need a timer, that's about how long it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice. (Just keep it to yourself.)

6. How should you dry off?

Don't just drip-dry. Schaffner says wet hands will pick up more bacteria from whatever you touch next, like if you go back to your desk and start clacking away at your keyboard. Paper towels will help rub off even more bacteria, he says. If you're stuck in a bathroom without them, shake off as much water as you can and use an air dryer, or wipe your hands on your pants if you have to.

7. What about sanitizers?

Glad you asked! They work just as well as washing your hands, Gerba says. So if you're too lazy to scrub for 20 seconds, using a gel like Purell is a good substitute—and certainly better than nothing. Sanitizers are also great in a pinch when there's no place to wash, if the soap isn't antibacterial, or if there aren't any paper towels. And luckily, it's hard to screw up sanitizer, Schaffner says: Just rub it around to coat your hands and go.

Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper. The first two questions can be answered in 1-2 sentences. The third question needs a full-page, well thought out response.

1. Who is the intended audience for this article, and how do you know that?
2. What was the author’s purpose for writing this article, and how do you know that?
3. How could we present this information to students at Westover Park to encourage them to wash their hands properly? (you may create a flyer or handout using the info from the article instead of writing a paragraph if you prefer)