

cool2know

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MODERN-DAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

Back to basics this flu season

Shaking hands supposedly began as a way to show that you didn't have a weapon in your hands. As it turns out, we do have a weapon in our hands: the flu virus. Human influenza viruses, the genetically mutated descendants of bird germs, are extremely clever and resilient little bugs. They can live on hands and on surfaces such as door-knobs, railings and computer keyboards for up to two hours.

Passed easily from person to person, they typically enter the body when a recipient touches his eyes, mouth or nose.

Flu is an inconvenience for most but deadly to some. About 36,000 people in the United States die every flu season, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and more than 120,000 are hospitalized with symptoms. Vaccines and antiviral drugs have prevented worse numbers, but flu

viruses also are notoriously creative and mutate into new strains that defy human resistance every 20 years or so.

The biggest culprit behind the colds may be hygiene. Consider this eeewwww-inducing factoid: The CDC estimates that one in three people don't wash their hands after using the bathroom.

For them, here's a little refresher on hand-washing just released in "The Little Cold Book" by Justin Spring (Quirk Books, \$9.95).

How to wash your hands

1. Wet hands with water.
2. Add soap or disinfectant cleanser, using approximately 1 teaspoon of liquid soap. If using bar soap, rub soap to

produce a generous amount of lather and then set the bar aside.

3. Rub hands together vigorously, lathering all areas of hand up to and including the wrist: palms, fingers, fingernails and areas between the fingers. Pay special attention to the area underneath fingernails, using a nail brush if necessary.

4. Continue in this manner for a full 15 to 20 seconds. (Sing the "Alphabet Song" to yourself; it is about 15 seconds long.)

5. Rinse hands thoroughly under running water.

6. Dry with a clean, dry towel or paper towel, rubbing vigorously. Friction helps to remove microorganisms.

— THE WASHINGTON POST



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