

Delta Gamma Well Aware

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Hand Sanitizers – The Facts

Hand sanitizers have become a fixture in the purses of many women. These “waterless” antibacterial gels and lotions have been touted as an alternative to handwashing when soap and water are not available. Manufacturers of hand sanitizers claim that they kill 99.9 percent of germs but this is not necessarily the case.

How do they Work?

- Most hand sanitizers contain alcohol (ethanol and/or isopropanol) with many brands containing a moisturizer to minimize skin irritation.
- Alcohol kills bacteria and most viruses; solutions containing 60 to 95 percent alcohol are most effective.
- Alcohol gels work by stripping away the outer layer of oil on the skin, thereby destroying the microorganisms present on the surface of the hands. After use, re-growth of bacteria on the skin tends to occur slowly, keeping “residual” bacteria that reside in deeper layers of skin from coming to the surface.
- To be most effective, a dime-size dollop of alcohol gel should be rubbed into the hands for 30 seconds. If hands are dry after only 10-15 seconds, it is likely that not enough sanitizer was used.

You Should Know:

- The Food and Drug Administration recommends that hand sanitizers not be used in place of soap and water but only as an adjunct.
- A hand sanitizer can not and should not take the place of proper cleansing procedures with soap and water.
- The bacteria destroyed when using an antimicrobial gel on the hands eliminates not only harmful bacteria, but harmless bacteria our body carries regularly.
- Hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol will not eliminate germs (bacteria or viruses) and should not be used to do so.

- Lotions and soaps that claim to be “antibacterial” or “antimicrobial” do not destroy bacteria or viruses as well as handwashing, and can potentially lead to resistant strains.

Wellness Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov

UC, Berkeley Wellness Letter, June 2006

U.S. Food and Drug Administration, www.fda.gov

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