



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov 27, 2006

Contact: Leslie Ridgeway (619) 685-2239

## **WASHING YOUR HANDS CAN HELP PROTECT FROM FLU, COLDS** *National Handwashing Week, Dec. 3-9, Stresses Importance of Hand Washing*

Sometimes the simplest things are the best. Take hand washing. Done properly and often, it's a good habit and a great way to help protect yourself and those around you from colds and flu.

Dec. 3-9 is National Handwashing Awareness Week, and a good time to think about the importance of hand washing.

"Washing your hands properly and often reduces the amounts of germs on your hands, which reduces the spread of diseases like colds and flu," said Nancy Bowen, M.D., County of San Diego Public Health Officer. "It should be done all year long, not just during flu season.

"Because it's such a simple act, it may be taken for granted," Dr. Bowen added. "People may not wash their hands as often or as thoroughly as they should. Thorough hand washing should be done before handling food, after going to the bathroom and anytime your hands get dirty."

Health officials advise washing your hands for at least 20 seconds, using soap and warm water and scrubbing all surfaces of the hands and fingers thoroughly. If soap and warm water aren't available, a hand gel with at least 60 percent alcohol can be used.

Frequent and correct hand washing is just one way to protect your health and those around you. You should also stay away from sick people whenever possible, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve whenever you cough or sneeze, and stay home when you are sick. Other good health habits include getting regular exercise, enough rest, and maintaining a proper diet with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Of course, one of the best ways to prevent the flu itself is to get a flu vaccination each year. It's not too late to get one, as flu season often lasts until March or later. For recorded information about flu vaccine being offered at County Health facilities, please call the County Flu Information Line at 1-866-358-2966. For additional clinic sites, and for locations for persons who are not eligible to receive flu vaccine in public clinics because they are not in the high-risk groups, please call the CHIP/Aging and Independence Services Flu Hotline for a referral at 1-877-358-0202. Or, visit the CHIP website at [www.sdchip.org](http://www.sdchip.org).

###