

St. Jude Parents

FEBRUARY 2008

St. Jude hand cleaning study reveals room for improvement

They've been watching to see if you clean your hands, and the numbers are in. Who? What numbers? No, they're not the hand washing police or big brother. They're just a random group of staff members who were recruited by St. Jude Infection Control to find out how well employees and patient family members clean their hands.

Near the end of last year, Infection Control asked several staff members to become observers of hand cleaning practices. These staff members watched at times when employees and family members should be cleaning their hands. They kept records including the name of the hospital unit, the type of person (doctor, nurse, other employee, family member, visitor) and whether the person cleaned his or her hands.

Cleaning your hands is still the easiest and best way to prevent the spread of infection. And nowhere is this more important than in a hospital

like St. Jude, where many patients have trouble fighting off germs that cause infection.

Hospitals across the country have held hand cleaning studies, and the numbers are not comforting. The average rate of hand cleaning compliance in the United States is only 40 percent. The hand cleaning study at St. Jude showed that almost all employees clean their hands when they should. "Of course, we will keep working on this until we reach 100 percent," said Infection Control Officer Jon McCullers, MD.

According to the same study, less than half of family members and visitors clean their hands when needed. "I feel that parents and other family members would clean their hands more often if they understood how serious this is for their children's health," McCullers said.

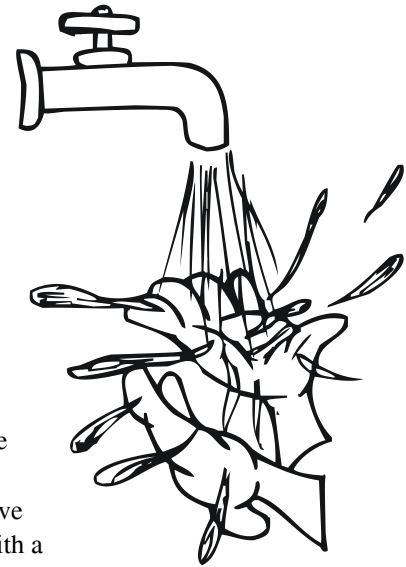
In a child with a weakened immune system, even the simplest virus like a cold can become a life-threatening

infection.

The Infection Control staff encourages patients and parents to talk to their visitors and other parents about hand cleaning. In most cases, alcohol-based hand cleaning gel will work as well as soap and water for killing germs on your hands. The most important times to clean your hands include the following:

- Anytime you have direct contact with a patient, including your own child
- Before entering a patient room and after leaving a patient room
- After using the restroom
- After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- After going outside and after touching pets
- Before and after eating
- Before and after feeding your child

To learn more about the best ways to clean your hands, ask your clinic nurse for a copy of the handout "Do You Know... Clean Hands." You can also watch the *Hand washing* video on the Instant HealthLine on-demand video system. Instant HealthLine videos can be viewed in the Medicine Room, the Blood Donor Center and all inpatient rooms.



Fun activities offered in March to celebrate National Nutrition Month

Do you like milk, cheese, eggs, yogurt? Maybe ice cream is your favorite. No matter which one you like best, dairy foods are an important part of a balanced diet. The registered dietitians in St. Jude Clinical Nutrition will teach you and your children more about the goodness of dairy throughout March – National Nutrition Month.

Don't miss the fun and informative activities these dietitians have planned for you.

Tuesday, March 4 – Milk mustache treats will be offered in the Patient Care Center Lobby at 11 a.m.

Monday, March 10 – Registered Dietitian Day – Whitney Orth, RD, will present an informative talk called "Is Being

Overweight Weighing You Down?" It will be held in the St. Jude North Auditorium from noon to 1 p.m. Light refreshments will be served.

Tuesday, March 11 – The Southwest Mobile Dairy Classroom will visit St. Jude. Children can learn about the milking process from a real cow who comes with her own mobile dairy classroom. Please talk to your child's doctor before attending this session. The classroom will be parked in front of the Patient Care Center Lobby at 11 a.m.

Tuesday, March 25 – Dietitians will offer crafts for patients and siblings in the Patient Care Center Lobby beginning at 11 a.m.

All month – Check out the milk and dairy display outside the cafeteria.

If you ever have questions about your child's nutritional needs, the Clinical Nutrition staff is here to serve you. Call 495-3318 to speak to a registered dietitian.

Park your trikes outside Kay Kafé

Tricycles are a fun way for kids to get around St. Jude. However, the cafeteria serving area, where hot food and beverages are handled, is not a safe place for children to ride. A special parking area for tricycles has been reserved near the cafeteria entrance. Please help keep your child safe by parking tricycles while you are in the cafeteria.



Schedules change; get the latest when you arrive

Have you ever received a schedule in the mail but when you arrived at St. Jude your child's appointments had changed? This is not uncommon. Schedules can change even from one afternoon to the next morning. The goal is for patients to have all the appointments they need each day while at the same time making the best use of the hospital's resources. This means St. Jude nurse schedulers are juggling hundreds of appointments every day, trying to fit everyone in at

the needed times.

For off-therapy patients, schedules usually change within one or two weeks of the visit. As clinical staff reviews charts for upcoming clinics, they might decide to add or remove something from a schedule. Sometimes schedules are changed to fit in new patients or patients with urgent needs. Other times, schedules change because the machines used for the tests are not available or being moved. This has caused many schedule changes since late October.

For on-therapy patients, any number of things can affect a schedule from hour to hour. Chemotherapy might be given late today, and so the

time needs to be changed on following days. A scheduler may confirm a pending MRI appointment after 4 p.m. At the last minute, a patient's blood counts might be too low to do some treatments and low enough to require other needs.

Please keep in mind that the last schedule card you receive might not be correct a few hours later. Always check with your nurse scheduler at the end of each hospital day or pick up a new schedule each morning. If your child is off-therapy, please check for schedule changes as soon as you arrive on campus. Working together, we can make sure all your child's St. Jude visits go smoothly.



Storing medicines correctly

by Shane Cross, PharmD, Pharmaceutical Department

We've all heard how important it is to take medicines correctly, but their proper storage can be just as crucial. Medicines can lose their strength and will not work as well if they are exposed to too much moisture, heat or sunlight. So be sure to store them in a cool, dry place away from sunlight. Contrary to popular belief, bathroom medicine cabinets are not good places to store medicines. Bathrooms are too warm and humid.

Some other tips for storing medicines:

- Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.
- Store medicines in child-proof containers.
- If a medicine needs to be kept cold, store it on the top shelf of the refrigerator, out of sight from children.
- Check the expiration dates often, and discard anything that is out of date.

If you have questions about the proper storage of medicines, please ask your child's doctor or pharmacist.

New division but same phone numbers

You might have heard that the social workers and chaplains are now members of Patient Care Services instead of Behavioral Medicine. This is true, but it will not affect how you reach your social worker or chaplain. You can still call a social worker or chaplain directly, using their pager numbers. Also, you can call the Social Work office at 495-3670 or the Chaplain Services office at 495-3672.



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St. Jude Parents is published on the 15th of each month by Public Relations and Patient Education. Your questions and comments are important to us. **We want to print advice and tips from St. Jude parents to other St. Jude parents.** To share your ideas or to receive this newsletter by e-mail, please call Alicia Huettel, RN, at (901) 495-5453 (parents_newsletter@stjude.org) or Elizabeth Walker (elizabeth.walker@stjude.org) at (901) 495-2125. St. Jude is an Equal Opportunity Employer.