

South Carolina leads nation in hand hygiene

Continuous News Desk Staff
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COLUMBIA, SC — The World Health Organization has invited the South Carolina Hospital Association to lead the United States in a campaign to curb the spread of influenza and other communicable diseases. WHO asked the SCHA to develop a creative way to promote greater compliance and more effective use of a basic, yet most important hygiene habit—hand washing.

ADDITIONAL CONTENT

Video: [GSI: SC Grime Scene Investigation with Dr. Rick Foster](#)

How to Wash Your Hands with Soap and Water:

1. Wet hands with warm water.
2. Apply ample soap and lather.
3. Rub palm to palm and backs of hands.
4. Interlace fingers, ring thumbs and wrists.
5. Scrub under nails.
6. Continue for 15-20 seconds. (Sing The Birthday Song twice.)
7. Rinse well.
8. Dry with single use towel. Use towel to turn off water.

How to Use an Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizer:

1. Rub product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

“Hand washing is a powerful weapon in our fight against the spread of infectious diseases,” said Dr. Richard Foster, Senior Vice President for Quality and Patient Safety with the SCHA. “The benefits of proper hand washing are proven, but I stress the word proper. It seems simple and yet most people don’t wash their hands thoroughly. You can’t rinse away germs with a quick splash. You have to soap up, use warm water, scrub between fingers, under nails. Drying hands is also important since bacteria thrive in moist environments.”

Dr. Foster says that a current hand washing campaign in South Carolina hospitals has shown a significant drop in the spread of infectious diseases within these institutions, including highly contagious forms of staph. With the country poised for an onslaught of the H1N1 influenza virus, commonly known as swine flu, the SCHA wants to spread the word that simple preventative measures work.

“We want to take hand washing awareness to other healthcare providers such as dental practices, nursing homes, daycare centers and doctors offices. We want to bring attention to the need for proper hygiene to the public at large,” Dr. Foster explained. “That’s why we’ve launched the Grime Scene Investigation.”

Dr. Foster and the SCHA teamed with creative director Tim Floyd to develop a fun, attention-grabbing campaign to make people aware of the benefits of hand washing. Tim partnered with Post No Bills, Inc. to manufacture the content of the GSI Investigation Kits and to provide detailed execution and program expansion. A clever take on the pop culture interest in forensic investigative crime shows, the Grime Scene Investigation campaign is a mock-murder drama that plays out in the middle of busy lobbies, sidewalks, hallways and offices. Dressed in white Tyvek suits, actors tape the outline of a body on the floor and surround it with orange warning cones strung with “Grime Scene” yellow barrier tape. Passersby are slapped with a sticker that reads, “SUSPECT!”

“People are intrigued by the unexpected scenario. Then you accuse them of being a perpetrator with the SUSPECT sticker and they really want to know what’s going on,” Floyd said. The SUSPECT stickers are a way to draw attention to the fact that anyone could transmit deadly germs. “Grime scene investigators ask, ‘Could you have killed the victim? If you don’t properly wash your hands you could be guilty of spreading the germs that caused this fatality.’” Once drawn into the drama, suspects are shown the proper way to wash their hands and given pocket hand sanitizer with the GSI logo to remind them of their duty to cleanliness.

“It’s a kitschy way to draw attention to a deadly serious subject,” Dr. Foster explained. “This is particularly true as we move into flu season with the heightened urgency brought by the H1N1 virus pandemic.” Dr. Foster emphasizes that the term pandemic refers only to geographic range of occurrence. A disease becomes pandemic if it spreads globally. Pandemic does not refer to severity nor morbidity rate. “There are always deaths associated with influenza every year. While swine flu is widespread, it doesn’t appear to be significantly more virulent than other strains. People should be concerned and cautious, but not panicked.”

Dr. Foster stresses that people need to get a shot for both the seasonal flu and the swine flu. Caregivers of young children, children, young adults, healthcare workers, emergency personnel, pregnant women, older people and those with compromised immune systems are at higher risk and should be inoculated as soon as possible.

For those who are hesitant, Dr. Foster is reassuring. “Flu shots cannot give you the flu. A little fever means that the shot is working and that antibodies are building up. The benefits greatly outweigh risk.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) closely monitors key flu indicators to track disease activity in the United States using the number of doctor visits for flu-like symptoms, hospitalization rates for confirmed influenza, number of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza and breadth of reported activity. All indicators confirm a higher than expected level of flu activity for this time of the year in the United States, with South Carolina continuing to be a hot spot. Almost all of the influenza viruses identified so far are 2009 H1N1 influenza A viruses. These viruses remain similar to the virus chosen for the 2009 H1N1 vaccine, and remain susceptible to the antiviral drugs oseltamivir and zanamivir with rare exception.

On an international level, the World Health Organization reports that in 2009, the H1N1 continues to be the dominant influenza virus in circulation in the world. Over half of influenza specimens reported to WHO worldwide since April, are H1N1 viruses. While declining in some locations around the globe, in temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere (U.S., Mexico and Canada), there is increased influenza-like illness activity. In Europe and Central and Western Asia, overall influenza activity remains low, but an increase has been noted in a number of countries and continues to intensify in others.

As the United States continues into the heart of flu season the South Carolina Hospital Association will be taking its Grime Scene Investigation on the road, making appearances at festivals, sports events and the state fair. The SCHA is developing a broad community-based network of partners to get the message out about proper hand hygiene.

“In many instances, we’re hand rinsing not hand washing,” Floyd explained. “The GSI objective is to create a cultural shift so we develop a national hand washing habit. It takes a while to change behavior, so this will be an ongoing campaign.” Floyd likened this positive change in behavioral habits to the national campaign to get people to use sunscreen. “Doctors and cosmetic companies got on board. The media covered sunscreen and cancer issues extensively. Many lives have been spared the ravages of skin cancer by this successful public health campaign. In the same way, we hope to truly affect daily habits to bring about positive change.”

South Carolina was chosen as the pilot program in hand washing awareness and the SCHA hopes to spread the licensed Grime Scene Investigation campaign to the rest of the nation. Initial plans are to involve hospital associations in other states, but the SCHA is banking on public awareness growing about this most important subject.

Any company or organization can have their own Grime Scene Investigation. Grime Scene Investigation kits can be purchased through the GSI store at <http://www.gsi-store.com>. A complete GSI kit includes everything needed to conduct a Grime Scene Investigation including a GSI forensics bag, two pairs of white coveralls with forensics on the back, three orange cones, body outline tape, police barrier tape, suspect spray, SUSPECT stickers, procedural manual, poster and other props. Younger audiences will enjoy learning how to wash hands properly through a mini-investigative kit that includes germ powder that can be seen under a black light, pencils and coloring books. New items become available on a regular basis. Most items can be custom branded. Check the website for complete details about how to bring the GSI project to your place of business or school.

