

Daily Union Article

Saturday February 10, 2018

Title: Keep It Clean

There is no doubt that its flu season in Kansas. It has been widely reported that we are the "sickest" state in the United States. Kansas has experienced too many deaths from the flu virus this season – 68 in all according to a recent report release by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Several weeks ago, I shared the importance of keeping your hands clean to help prevent the spread of illness. There's another very important task you should tackle to further protect your family from becoming ill or contracting the same illness multiple times. Cleaning and sanitizing your home multiple times during the peak of flu season can reduce the risk of a return visit from this nasty virus.

Sick family members become contagious before the symptoms of their illness actually present themselves. Once a family member becomes ill, sanitizing their personal space and the common spaces they share with the rest of the family is key.

The Centers for Disease Control reports that the flu virus itself is relatively fragile. By doing regular and intentional tasks to remove the virus from your home, you can increase the likeliness that your family won't just keep "passing it around." Here are the recommendations provided by CDC for making a clean sweep of the flu virus in your house:

1. Know the difference between cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing

Cleaning removes germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces. This process does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.

Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

Sanitizing lowers the number of germs on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. This process **works by either cleaning or disinfecting** surfaces or objects to lower the risk of spreading infection.

2. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched often

Sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones, and toys will help reduce the risk of re-infection. Immediately clean surfaces and objects that are visibly soiled. If you have sick family members but you are healthy, use gloves to do the cleaning to protect yourself from the germs.

3. Simply do routine cleaning and disinfecting

It is important to match your cleaning and disinfecting activities to the types of germs you want to remove or kill. Most studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for up to 48 hours after being deposited on a surface.

Flu viruses are relatively fragile, so standard cleaning and disinfecting practices are sufficient to remove or kill them. Follow normal cleaning and sanitizing routines to avoid introducing irritants that additional cleaners or air fresheners can cause.

4. Clean and disinfect correctly

Always follow label directions on cleaning products and disinfectants. Wash surfaces with a general household cleaner to remove germs. Rinse with water, and follow with an EPA-registered disinfectant to kill germs. Read the label to make sure it states that EPA has approved the product for effectiveness against influenza A virus.

If a surface is not visibly dirty, you can clean it with an EPA-registered product that both cleans (removes germs) and disinfects (kills germs) instead. Be sure to read the label directions carefully, as there may be a separate procedure for using the product as a cleaner or as a disinfectant. Disinfection usually requires the product to remain on the surface for a certain period of time (e.g., letting it stand for 3 to 5 minutes).

Use disinfecting wipes on electronic items that are touched often, such as television remote controls, phones, and computers. Pay close attention to the directions for using disinfecting wipes. It may be necessary to use more than one wipe to keep the surface wet for the stated length of contact time. Make sure that the electronics can withstand the use of liquids for cleaning and disinfecting.

5. Use products safely

Pay close attention to hazard warnings and directions on product labels. Cleaning products and disinfectants often call for the use of gloves or eye protection. For example, gloves should always be worn to protect your hands when working with bleach solutions.

Do not mix cleaners and disinfectants unless the labels indicate it is safe to do so. Combining certain products (such as chlorine bleach and ammonia cleaners) can result in serious injury or death.

6. Handle waste properly

Throw disposable items used to clean surfaces and items in the trash immediately after use. Avoid touching used tissues and other waste when emptying waste baskets. Wash your hands with soap and water after emptying waste baskets and touching used tissues and similar waste. Using disposable cleaning gloves is a good idea – especially if you have had sickness in your home already.

Keeping our families safe and healthy are top priorities for parents and care givers. Take a few minutes each day to tackle a task that will keep the virus from spreading through your home. For more information on family health and wellness, you can contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office, 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!