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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**IF YOU WANT TO PUT THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT OUT OF BUSINESS, WASH YOUR HANDS**

Today, Westchester County Health Commissioner Joshua Lipsman, MD, MPH will roll up his sleeves at the Summer Trails Camp in Somers and give a demonstration on properly washing your hands. (Rain Date: Friday, August 8<sup>th</sup> at noon.)

“Handwashing is the single most important thing a person can do to prevent getting sick,” stated Dr. Lipsman. “I’m not talking about just preventing the common cold. Diseases such as hepatitis A, meningitis, and infectious diarrhea, can be prevented by properly washing your hands. A recent report by the Food and Drug Administration indicates the importance of hand washing as a preventive method for SARS.”

“Sometimes the simplest things in life are the most effective, but often overlooked,” Dr. Lipsman added. “Unfortunately, many people don’t properly wash their hands. By frequently washing your hands you wash away germs that you have picked up from other people, contaminated surfaces, or animals and animal waste.”

While 94% of Americans say they wash their hands after using the bathroom in a recent survey, observations in public restrooms indicate only about 68% do.

As part of its handwashing campaign, “W.A.S.H.\* Up Westchester,” the Health Department will be encouraging businesses, schools and community organizations to join the campaign, by distributing literature to restaurants, clinics, neighborhood health centers, daycare facilities, schools and colleges, and posting a variety of information on its website, such as teaching activities for teachers and parents. (\*Wash And Soap your Hands.)

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“Both kids and adults need to be reminded of this simple, but effective way of keeping yourself healthy,” said Dave Silverstein, camp director of Summer Trails. “It only takes twenty seconds to properly wash hands, but if you don’t wash your hands, getting sick could be for a lot longer than that.”

There are six common household scenarios in which disease-causing germs can be transmitted by contaminated hands:

**Hand to food:** germs are transmitted from unclean hands to food, usually by an infected food preparer who didn’t handwash after using the toilet. The germs are then passed to those who eat the food.

**Infected infant to hands to other children:** during diaper changing, germs are passed from an infant with diarrhea to the hands of a parent; if the parent doesn’t immediately wash his or her hands before handling another child, the germs that cause diarrhea are passed to the second child.

**Food to hand to food:** germs are transmitted from raw, uncooked food, such as chicken, to hands; the germs are then transferred to other foods, such as salad. Cooking the raw food kills the initial germs, but the salad remains contaminated.

**Nose, mouth, or eyes to hands to others:** germs that cause colds, eye infections, and other illnesses can spread to the hands by sneezing, coughing, or rubbing the eyes and then can be transferred to other family members or friends.

**Food to hands to infants:** germs from uncooked foods are transferred to hands then to infants. If a parent handling raw chicken, for example, doesn’t wash his or her hands before tending to an infant, he or she could transfer germs such as salmonella from the food to the infant.

**Handling Pets:** Pets can transfer germs to people. For example, pet reptiles can cause salmonella infections in those who haven't washed their hands properly after handling the pet reptile or the cage.

Wash your hands:

- Before, during, and after you prepare food
- Before you eat, and after you use the bathroom
- After handling animals or animal waste
- When your hands are dirty
- More frequently when someone in your home is sick.

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The correct way to wash your hands:

- 1) First wet your hands and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Keep the bar soap on a rack that allows it to drain.
- 2) Next rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces.
- 3) Continue for 20 seconds. Tell kids to wash as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice. It is soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.
- 4) Rinse well and dry your hands.

“In an age where we are constantly making advances in technology and new treatments, we have to remember the basics in infection control...wash your hands!” Dr. Lipsman said.

For more information on W.A.S.H. Up Westchester, contact the Westchester County Department of Health at 813-5000 or visit [www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health)