

## The Counselor's Corner

### Project Hygiene

On April 1, 2009, we received a phone call from our son, telling us he was admitted to Sparrow Hospital. He was the first of 44 MSU students to get suddenly and severely sick, rushed to the hospital, admitted, and then quarantined. It was horrible for the young men and women who were writhing in pain, bombarded with unpleasant, intestinal issues. It was a nightmare for parents who were required to put on sterile gloves, masks, and hospital gowns before they could enter the room of their helpless, grown babes. Our kids were listless and dependent on IV bags for intravenous hydration.

After the health department had thoroughly investigated the situation, it was determined that most of the ill students had either eaten at Shaw Hall that day or had come in contact with someone who had.

Diagnosis: Norovirus.

This situation at MSU was not unique. The ugly virus that temporarily ravaged our children appears quite often in places where large groups of people dine. The culprit is "food or water that is contaminated through food preparation" (Mayo Clinic). In the simplest terms, the Norovirus can be caused by one person who fails to properly wash their hands and/or properly clean cooking areas.

As co-moderator of the National Junior Honor Society with Mrs. Kraetke, I am working with our 7<sup>th</sup> grade members on a campaign to help stop the spread of germs and illness within our school. The hygiene project will involve posters and visits to classrooms. There are many topics to be covered, but hand washing is paramount. Too often children and some adults do **drive-by hand washing**. After the hands are wet and a drop of soap applied, they do a quick rinse and head for the paper towels or the hand dryers, and consider the task completed. Starting with preschool, our 7<sup>th</sup> graders will expose the problems with this habit. They will instruct all grades that it takes twenty seconds of washing on all sides of the hand and in between the fingers to get the job done. For older students, counting one elephant, two elephants, up to twenty elephants will work. For those who cannot count, employing a song works well. Singing the alphabet song once or "Happy Birthday" twice is a great trick. All will be taught that sanitizer does not replace hand washing.

Other ways to contain germs through personal hygiene will be discussed. A great promoter of germs is random sneezing and coughing without consideration to others. When a person takes no precaution to stop the spread of their own diseases, germs rain down on the unsuspecting people around them. **Covering one's mouth when sneezing or coughing is no longer adequate**, because germs are caught by the hand which often will go off to touch and infect surfaces and people. Our NJHS members will illustrate that the best way to handle one's cough or sneeze is to utilize the inside of the elbow. And, when we have a cold or cough, we have no business shaking another's hand or touching their property. It is imperative that we adhere to keeping the personal space between ourselves and others at all times, but especially when we are ill

The call we got on April 1 was no joke. Any time we experience short-term bouts of colds, the flu, or intestinal upsets is far from pleasant. Each of us has a personal responsibility to protect ourselves and others from the spread of germs. Although no plan is foolproof, step one begins with serious and continuous hand-washing. Is **20 seconds** too much to devote to this cause?

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