



Good hand hygiene is crucial to helping ward off the flu this winter

Dry hands with single-use towels to keep you and your family healthy

Brussels, 19 February 2018; Europe is currently **in the grip of a flu epidemic**. The joint WHO-ECDC bulletin Flu News Europe reports both influenza A and B viruses as widespread across the continent with Italy, Luxembourg and Spain recording the highest number of cases and Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, Wales and Kosovo the second highest number.

As health services are strained to the limit, **major public information campaigns** such as the UK's '[Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)' are being **run in an attempt to reduce infections** of both flu and norovirus, which are being recorded in rising numbers.

Most of us come into contact with literally hundreds of people every day as we travel on public transport, go to school or work, and socialise in cafés or cinemas. Hence, every time we touch a door, a handrail, or handle cash, we potentially expose ourselves to a host of viruses. Experts urge that **practicing good hand hygiene is crucial to staying healthy and minimising the spread of infection**.

Leading virologist and epidemiologist Marc Van Ranst, of KU Leuven and the Rega Institute for Medical Research, has undertaken extensive research into virus transmission and has some important advice: "*Viruses can survive on the hands for a considerable time: influenza viruses last 10-15 minutes, herpes viruses for up to two hours, and the common cold virus and the rotavirus, which causes gastro-intestinal infections, for even longer. Hence proper hand washing and hand drying are essential to keeping infection at bay.*"

In public washrooms, people should use single-use towels to dry their hands after washing in order to minimise the risk of infection, and there is extensive research to support this. Experts at the University of Westminster, University of Leeds, and Leeds Teaching Hospitals have studied different hand drying methods and their potential to spread bacteria and viruses. They found that **single-use towels spread the lowest number of microbes of all hand-drying methods**, while jet air and warm air dryers can result in the widespread dispersal of micro-organisms – both in the air and through cross contamination.^{i, ii, iii}

A recent pilot study by the Microbiology department at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and the University of Leeds^{iv} also found that **washrooms with jet air dryers carried more microbes**. Floors and dryer units were the most heavily contaminated areas, with twenty-seven times more *Enterococcus faecalis* recovered from the jet air dryer unit compared to the paper towel dispenser. *Enterococcus faecalis* are known to cause a variety of infections.

Van Ranst concludes; "*Fostering good hand hygiene habits within the family is crucial in keeping people healthy – particularly during the winter months when flu and colds abound. The body of research confirms that single-use towels offer superior hand drying and minimise the spread of infection following hand washing.*"



Ends

For further information please contact duomedia

Riet Delsin | tel. +32 2 560 21 50 | riet.d@duomedia.com

About ETS

ETS is the European Tissue Paper Industry Association. The members of ETS represent the majority of tissue paper producers throughout Europe and around 90% of the total European tissue production. ETS was founded in 1971 and is based in Brussels. For more information visit www.europeantissue.com

ⁱ January 2016 (reference: Kimmitt, P.T. & Redway, K.F. Evaluation of the potential for virus dispersal during hand drying: a comparison of three methods. *Journal of Applied Microbiology*. **120**, 478-486. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jam.13014/full>

ⁱⁱ *Comparison of different hand-drying methods: the potential for airborne microbe dispersal and contamination* Keith Redway (Department of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Science and Technology, University of Westminster, London W1W 6UW, UK) and E.L. Best (Microbiology Department, Old Medical School, Leeds General Infirmary, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Leeds LS1 3EX, UK) *Journal of Hospital Infection*, Vol. 89, Issue 3, p215–21 Published online: December 17, 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ Microbiological comparison of hand-drying methods: the potential for contamination of the environment, user, and bystander E.L. Best, P. Parnell, M.H. Wilcox *Journal of Hospital Infection*, Vol. 88, Issue 4, p199–206 Published online: August 26, 2014

^{iv} Pilot study to determine whether microbial contamination levels in hospital washrooms are associated with hand-drying method. M.H Wilcox, E.L. Best, P. Parnell, Microbiology, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust & University of Leeds, Leeds, UK [http://www.journalofhospitalinfection.com/article/S0195-6701\(17\)30389-4/fulltext](http://www.journalofhospitalinfection.com/article/S0195-6701(17)30389-4/fulltext)