

# HEALTH

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A vigorous hand washing with soap is good for your health, but using antibacterial products may have some negative consequences.

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## Don't Scrub Away 'Good' Germs

### Antibacterial soaps get overused

BY CHRIS THOMAS

The cold and flu season is here, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends hand-washing as a way to protect yourself. However, a study from Johns Hopkins University questions whether we're getting "too clean" by using antibacterial products.

The researchers found that children with higher levels of chemicals from antibacterial soaps had more allergies.

Allergy and immunology specialist Dr. Jay Portnoy says not all types of bacteria are bad, so you don't want to scrub away the good ones.

"If we start to kill off all the normal bacteria, use too many antimicrobial soaps, then we don't develop the ability to get along with them, and they don't provide the service we're used to."

Health researchers say a lack of exposure to the "bad" bacteria can cause a person's immune system to become overactive and react to common things like cats and pollen. Portnoy says hand washing is important to prevent the spread of

disease - and using regular soap and water will get the job done.

He describes it as a "symbiotic relationship" with the normal bacteria living on and in us.

"Our skin has bacteria on it. Our intestines have bacteria in them, and they provide services. They help us digest our food. They help produce vitamins and minerals for us. They help to fend off the pathogens or the bad bacteria."

The doctor says not washing your hands isn't an option. He just believes more study is needed of the chemicals in antibacterial soaps.

Chris Thomas is a producer with Oregon News Service.

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