



## HAND WASHING

### What is proper hand washing?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends washing hands often and vigorously with soap and warm, running water for at least 20 seconds.

### Why is proper hand washing important?

Handwashing is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your family from getting sick and washing hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations. When we touch our noses, mouths, eyes, and open wounds with unwashed hands, we risk spreading germs, viruses, and diseases that cause diarrhea, colds, and other more serious (sometimes even life-threatening) diseases.

### When should hands be washed?

Always wash your hands:

- After using the bathroom
- After changing diapers
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Any time hands are visibly soiled
- Before and after eating
- Before and after preparing food (especially after food preparation when raw meats, poultry or fish are involved)
- Before treating cuts or wounds, or tending to the sick
- Before inserting or removing contact lenses
- After handling garbage or soil (including yard work)
- After touching animals (including household pets) or discarding their waste
- Before and after visiting any hospital, doctor's office, or clinic.

### What steps should one follow to correctly wash hands?

- Use soap and warm or cold clean running water.
- Wash all surfaces thoroughly, including wrists, palms, backs of hands, fingers and under fingernails.
- Rub soapy hands together for at least 20 seconds.
  - For a timer, hum "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
  - CDC recommends turning off the faucet after wetting your hands to reduce water use. Then, turn it on again after you have washed them for 20 seconds, to rinse off the soap.



# Frequently Asked Questions

- Rinse hands with clean running water.
  - According to the CDC, if you are concerned about getting germs on your hands after you wash them, you can use a paper towel, your elbow, or another hands-free way to turn off the faucet.
- To dry hands, use clean or disposable towels or use an air dryer. Both are effective ways to dry hands and reduce germs.
  - Dry hands completely.
  - To avoid chapping and cracking, pat the skin rather than rubbing it. Apply hand lotion afterwards to soothe dry skin.
  - To open the door without getting germs on your hands after washing them, the CDC states that you can use a paper towel, your elbow, your shirt, or another hands-free way.

## **When should hand sanitizer be used?**

Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available, and hands are not visibly soiled. However, alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not get rid of all types of germs and do not remove harmful chemicals like pesticides. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not effective against greasy or visibly dirty hands. When using hand sanitizer, supervise and keep alcohol-based sanitizer out of reach from young children due to the risk of alcohol poisoning.

## **How should hand sanitizer be used?**

- Apply the alcohol-based product to hands (a generous amount should be enough to cover both hands).
- Cover all surfaces of hands.
- Rub your hands and fingers together until dried. This should take about 20 seconds.

## **References**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/faqs.html>