

Hand Washing

Germs such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites are found everywhere. They can be in the air and water, and they can be on surfaces like food, door handles, and your skin. Every day, your hands come into contact with germs. Many of these germs can make you and your family sick. Washing your hands is one of the easiest and most effective ways to lower your risk of getting and sharing germs.

When should I wash my hands?

You should wash your hands whenever you think they are dirty. You should also wash your hands:

- Before:
 - Visiting a baby or anyone with a weakened disease-fighting system (*immune system*).
 - Putting in or taking out contact lenses.
- After:
 - Using the bathroom or helping someone else use the bathroom.
 - Working or playing outside.
 - Touching or taking out the garbage.
 - Touching anything dirty around your home.
 - Sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose.
 - Using a phone, including your mobile phone.
 - Touching an animal, animal food, animal waste, or its toys or leash.
 - Touching money.
 - Using household cleaners or toxic chemicals.
 - Handling soiled clothes, bedding, or rags.
 - Using public transportation.
 - Going shopping, especially if you use a shopping cart or basket.
 - Shaking hands.
 - Handling livestock.
- Before and after:
 - Preparing food.
 - Eating.
 - Visiting or taking care of someone who is sick. This includes touching used tissues, toys, and clothes.
 - Changing a bandage (*dressing*) or taking care of an injury or wound.
 - Giving or taking medicine.
 - Preparing a bottle for a baby.
 - Feeding a baby or young child.
 - Changing a diaper.

What is the correct way to wash my hands?

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water. Turn off the water or move your hands out of the running water.
2. Apply liquid soap or bar soap to your hands.
3. Rub your hands together quickly to create lather.
4. Keep rubbing your hands together for at least 20 seconds. Thoroughly scrub all parts of your hands, including under your fingernails and between your fingers.
5. Rinse your hands with clean, running water until all the soap is gone.
6. Dry your hands using an air dryer or a clean paper or cloth towel, or let your hands air-dry. **Do not** use your clothing or a soiled towel to dry your hands.



If you are in a public restroom, use a paper towel:

- To turn off the water faucet.
- To open the bathroom door.

How can I clean my hands if I do not have soap and water?

If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based wipe, spray, or hand gel. Use a hand-sanitizing agent that contains at least 60% alcohol. If you are preparing food, hand sanitizers are not recommended as a replacement for hand washing with soap and water.



To use a hand sanitizer, follow the directions on the product, and:

- Apply enough product to cover your hands.
- Make sure you wipe, rub, or spray the product so that it reaches every part of your hands and wrists. Include the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your fingernails.
- Rub the product onto your hands until it dries.

Summary

- Germs such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites are found everywhere.
- Your hands come into contact with germs every day. Many of these germs can make you and your family sick.
- Washing your hands is one of the easiest and most effective ways to lower your risk of getting and sharing germs.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.