

Handwashing is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your family from getting sick. Learn when and how you should wash your hands to stay healthy.

How Germs Spread

Washing hands can keep you healthy and prevent the spread of respiratory and diarrheal infections. Germs can spread from person to person or from surfaces to people when you:

- Touch your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Prepare or eat food and drinks with unwashed hands
- Touch surfaces or objects that have germs on them
- Blow your nose, cough, or sneeze into hands and then touch other people's hands or common objects

Key Times to Wash Hands



You can help yourself and your loved ones stay healthy by washing your hands often, especially during these key times when you are likely to get and spread germs:

- Before, during, and after preparing food; between handling raw foods
- Before and after eating food
- Between different jobs or caring for different people
- Before and after caring for someone at home who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After using the toilet or helping others in the bathroom or with hygiene
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste; after handling pet food
- After touching garbage
- After smoking
- Whenever hands are dirty

Why wash your hands?

- To remove harmful bacteria; to prevent passing bacteria that may cause illness
- To ensure clean conditions
- To prevent spread of bacteria from one person to another
- To prevent bacteria spread from an unclean item to a clean item
- Bacteria in the nose and mouth can be spread by coughs and sneezing
- Hair is a prime breeding ground for bacteria
- Fecal matter contains harmful bacteria
- Saliva (and bacteria) on hands or cigarettes are transmitted to anything they touch
- To prevent passing bacteria from hands and mouth or any other area

If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to clean your hands.

Follow Five Steps to Wash Your Hands the Right Way

Washing your hands is easy, and it's one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs. Clean hands can help stop germs from spreading from one person to another and in our communities—including your home, workplace, schools, and childcare facilities.

Follow these five steps every time.

- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or an air dryer.



Why? Read the science behind the recommendations.

Use Hand Sanitizer When You Can't Use Soap and Water - Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations. If soap and water are not readily available, you can use an alcohol-based [hand sanitizer](#) that contains at least 60% alcohol. You can tell if the sanitizer contains at least 60% alcohol by looking at the product label.

- Sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in many situations. However, Sanitizers do not get rid of all types of germs.
- Hand sanitizers may not be as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy.
- Hand sanitizers might not remove harmful chemicals like pesticides from hands.
- Caution! Swallowing alcohol-based hand sanitizer can cause alcohol poisoning if more than a couple of mouthfuls are swallowed. [Keep it out of reach of young children and supervise their use.](#)

How to Use Hand Sanitizer

1. **Apply** the gel product to the palm of one hand (read the label to learn the correct amount).
2. **Cover** all surfaces of hands.
3. **Rub** your hands and fingers together until they are dry. This should take around 20 seconds.

