



About Handwashing

KEY POINTS

- Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water.
- Handwashing with soap is one of the best ways to stay healthy.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to clean your hands.



Why it's important

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
- Before and after eating food
- 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
- After [changing diapers](#) or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
- After handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching garbage

How it works

Washing your hands is easy, and it's one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs. Follow these five steps every time.

1. **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
2. **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.

- 3. **Scrub** your hands **for at least 20 seconds**. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.
- 4. **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- 5. **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or an air dryer.

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.

Keep Reading:
[Hand Sanitizer Facts](#)

What you can do

CDC has [health promotion materials](#) to encourage kids and adults to make handwashing part of their everyday lives.

- Share social media graphics and messages.
- Print stickers and place clings on bathroom mirrors.
- Promote handwashing on or around [Global Handwashing Day](#), celebrated each year on October 15.
- Distribute fact sheets to share information about hand hygiene for specific audiences.

Resources

- [Frequent Questions About Hand Hygiene](#)
- [Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings](#)
- [The *Life is Better with Clean Hands* Campaign](#)

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
[National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases \(NCEZID\)](#)