

Hand Washing

Recommendations for Hand Washing

Why is hand washing important?

Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of diseases. Good hand washing technique is easy to learn and can significantly reduce the spread of infectious diseases among both children and adults.

What is good hand washing technique?

There is more to hand washing than you think! By rubbing your hands vigorously with soapy water, you pull the dirt and the oily soils free from your skin. The soap lather suspends both the dirt and the germs trapped inside and then quickly washes them away.

Follow these four simple steps to keep hands clean:

1. Wet your hands with warm running water.
2. Add soap, then rub your hands together, making a soapy lather. Do this away from the running water for at least 15 to 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the ABCs). Be careful not to wash the lather away. Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
3. Rinse your hands well under warm running water. Let the water run back into the sink, not down to your elbows.
4. Dry hands thoroughly with a clean towel, then turn off the water with a clean paper towel and dispose of it in a proper receptacle.

What type of soap should be used?

Any type of soap may be used. However, bar soap should be kept in a self-draining holder that is cleaned thoroughly before new bars are put out, and liquid soap containers (which must be used in day-care centers) should be used until empty and cleaned before refilling. To prevent chapping, use a mild soap with warm water, pat rather than rub hands dry, and apply lotion liberally and frequently.

What are some mistakes I should avoid regarding hand washing?

- DON'T use a single damp cloth to wash a group of children's hands.
- DON'T use a standing basin of water to rinse hands.
- DON'T use a common hand towel. Always use disposable towels in a day-care or food preparation setting.

- DON'T use sponges or non-disposable cleaning cloths unless you launder them on a regular basis, adding chlorine bleach to the wash water. Remember that germs thrive on moist surfaces.

What are some ways to help children with good hand-washing technique?

It is important to encourage and help children to wash hands before eating, after playing outdoors or with pets, after using the bathroom, and after blowing their noses. Even though hands may appear to be clean, they may carry germs that are capable of causing disease.

Don't assume that children know how to wash their hands properly. Supervision, especially in a day-care setting, is an essential element in forming good hand-washing habits in children. Finally, children learn by example! Let them observe good hand-washing technique from the adults who care for them.

May I use the over-the-counter alcohol sanitizers for washing my hands instead of using soap and water?

These products, which can be found wherever soap is sold, are very effective at killing germs on the hands as long as your hands are not visibly dirty. They should be used when soap and water are not readily available.

To use correctly, apply about a teaspoonful of the alcohol sanitizer on the palm of one hand. Then rub all over both hands, making sure you rub the front, back and fingernail areas of both hands. Let the alcohol dry, which should take about 30 seconds.

If your hands look dirty but you have no other way to wash your hands, use the sanitizer but wash with soap and water as soon as you can.