

# Hand Washing

## The First Line of Defense Against Germs

Germs - such as bacteria and viruses - can be transmitted several different ways, especially through personal contact, touching door knobs and other surfaces, or using the bathroom. Other ways germs spread include:

- through contaminated water and food
- through droplets released during a cough or a sneeze

If you pick up germs from one of these sources, you can unknowingly become infected simply by touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.



Good hand washing fights the spread of many illnesses - and not just the common cold. More serious illnesses such as meningitis, bronchitis, influenza, hepatitis A, and most types of infectious diarrhea can be stopped with the simple act of washing your hands.

### When to Wash Your Hands

- *Before and after preparing or serving food (especially careful to wash before and after preparing poultry, raw eggs, meat, or seafood)*
- *After:*
  - Eating or snacking.
  - Handling money.
  - Touching your ears, nose, or mouth.
  - Blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - Touching your pets.
  - Any kind of cleaning or hand contact dirty surfaces
  - Caring for someone who is sick or injured.
  - Taking out the garbage.
  - Using the bathroom.
  - Changing diapers.

### Proper hand-washing

- Use warm or hot water when possible.
- Wet your hands and wrists completely under the running water.
- Apply a small dab of liquid soap. If you use bar soap, rinse it off before you use it.
- Work up a good lather and wash all of the surfaces of your skin, including the wrist, palms, backs of your hands, fingers, and fingernails.
- Wash your hands for at least 15 to 20 seconds.
- Rinse your hands thoroughly.
- Dry your hands.
- Use your paper towel to turn off the water after you have finished.

### Proper use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers — which don't require water — are an excellent alternative to hand washing, particularly when soap and water aren't available. They're actually more effective than soap and water in killing bacteria and viruses that cause disease. However, soap should be used if hands are visibly dirty.

#### To use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

Apply about 1/2 tsp of the product to the palm of your hand.

Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.



### Sources:

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)