



# Hand Washing



## A simple way to prevent infection

Do you know the benefits of good hand hygiene and when and how to wash your hands properly?

Despite the proven health benefits of hand washing, many people don't practice this habit as often as they should — even after using the bathroom. Throughout the day you accumulate germs on your hands from a variety of sources, such as direct contact with people, contaminated surfaces, foods, even animals and animal waste. If you don't wash your hands frequently enough, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. And you can spread these germs to others by touching them or by touching surfaces that they also touch, such as doorknobs.

Infectious diseases commonly spread through hand-to-hand contact include the common cold, flu and several gastrointestinal disorders, such as infectious diarrhea. While most people will get over a cold, the flu is much more serious. Some people with the flu, particularly older adults and people with chronic medical problems, can develop pneumonia. The combination of the flu and pneumonia, in fact, is the seventh leading cause of death among Americans.

Inadequate hand hygiene also contributes to food-related illnesses. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as many as 76 million Americans contract a food-borne illness each year. Of these, about 5,000 die as a result of their illness. Others experience the annoying symptoms of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

**One of the food safety rules is to wash hands in hot, soapy water. Does hot water kill bacteria?**

Hot water that is comfortable for washing hands is not hot enough to kill bacteria. The body oils on your hands hold soils and bacteria, so hot or warm, soapy water is more effective than cold, soapy water at removing those oily soils and the bacteria in them.

**How can I clean my hands when water is not available, such as when traveling or picnicking away from home?**

You can use disposable wipes or a hand gel sanitizer. You use the gel without water. The alcohol in the gel kills the germs on your hands. You can find disposable wipes and hand gel sanitizers in most supermarkets and drugstores.

## Five Common Scenarios

### How are germs transferred?

**Hands to food:** germs are transmitted from unclean hands to food, usually by an infected food preparer who didn't handwash after using the toilet. The germs are then passed to those who eat the food.

**Infected infant to hands to other children:** during diaper changing, germs are passed from an infant with diarrhea to the hands of a parent; if the parent doesn't immediately wash his or her hands before handling another child, the germs that cause diarrhea are passed to the second child.

It has been estimated that proper **hand-washing** could eliminate close to half of all cases of food-borne illness.

Women wash their hands more often than men (74% versus 61%).

A study of 305 school children found that youngsters who washed their hands 4 times a day had 24% fewer sick days due to respiratory illness and 51% fewer days due to upset stomach.

**Food to hands to food:** germs are transmitted from raw, uncooked foods, such as chicken, to hands; the germs are then transferred to other foods, such as salad. Cooking the raw food kills the initial germs, but the salad remains contaminated.

**Nose, mouth, or eyes to hands to others:** germs that cause colds, eye infections, and other illnesses can spread to the hands by sneezing, coughing, or rubbing the eyes and then can be transferred to other family members or friends.

**Food to hands to infants:** germs from uncooked foods are transferred to hands and then to infants. If a parent handling raw chicken, for example, doesn't wash his or her hands before tending to an infant, they could transfer germs such as salmonella from the food to the infant.

Handwashing can prevent the transfer of germs in all five of these scenarios. CDC recommends vigorous scrubbing with warm, soapy water for at least 15 seconds.



Source: Center for Disease Control and Mayo Clinic



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