

Handwashing Hygiene

CDC Recommendations



Washing your hands is easy, and it's one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs. Clean hands can stop germs from spreading from one person to another and throughout an entire community—from your home and workplace to childcare facilities and hospitals.

Wash Your Hands Often to Stay Healthy

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, such as:

- Before, during, and after preparing or 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, 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, animal waste, or after handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching garbage or obvious gross contamination
- As a health care professional, before and after treating or touching patients

Follow These Five Steps Every Time

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, such as:

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. (Hum the “Happy Birthday” song twice for a timer.)
4. Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
5. Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

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. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. A few notes:

- Use sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol.
- Apply the gel in the palm of one hand and rub hands together until dry, it should take about 20 seconds.
- Sanitizers do not get rid of all types of germs and are not as effective with visible dirt or grease.
- Hand sanitizers may not remove harmful chemicals from hands like pesticides and heavy metals.

For more information, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/hand/handwashing.html>