



How to Keep Your Hands Germ Free

Three Methods: [Washing Your Hands](#) [Using Hand Sanitizer](#) [Keeping Germs Off Your Hands](#)

Hands exposed to germs by direct or indirect contact are one of the many ways people get sick. Germs on your hands can easily enter the body and cause conditions such as salmonellosis, hepatitis A, enterovirus, the flu, streptococcus, and the common cold. The best way to keep your hands germ free is by washing your hands thoroughly.^[1] You can also minimize germs by using hand sanitizer and avoiding contact with potentially contaminated surfaces.^[2]

Method
1

Washing Your Hands

1 Wet your hands with water. Before you start lathering up with soap, wet your hands with clean, running water for a few seconds. You can use warm or cold water. Make sure to turn off the faucet when you're finished wetting your hands.^[3]

- Avoid using hot water because it can scald or burn your hands.

2 Lather up with soap. When your hands are wet, apply soap to them. Choose a liquid, bar, or powder soap. Lather the soap well over every surface of your hands.^[4]

- Choose any soap you like to lather and scrub your hands. Using antibacterial soap is no more effective than regular soap and it may contribute to the development of bacteria and germs that are resistant to antimicrobials agents.

3 Rub all the surfaces of your hands. After you've lathered the soap on your hands, rub them vigorously. Twenty seconds is the proper length of time for the soap to clean your hands of germs.^[5]

- Get every surface of your hands when rubbing them with the soap. This includes the fronts and backs of your hands, between fingers, and under your nails. You can also extend the lather up to your wrists if necessary.^[6]
- Time yourself by humming or singing "Happy Birthday" to yourself twice from beginning to end.^[7] You can also say the alphabet.
- Avoid washing away the lather you've created.

4 Rinse your hands thoroughly. After rubbing your hands vigorously with soap for 20 seconds, you can rinse them well under clean, running water.^[8] You can rinse with warm or cool water.

- Turn the water faucet back on if you turned it off after wetting your hands.
- Make sure to put each surface of your hands—front, back, between fingers, and under nails-- under the running water to get off any soap or residue from it.

5 Dry your hands. Using a clean towel or an air dryer, dry your hands thoroughly.^[9] Avoid using shared towels to dry your hands, which can spread more germs to your hands.^[10]

- Shake your hands dry if there aren't any clean paper or cloth towels or air dryers.

6 Turn off the faucet. A faucet can also transmit germs, especially if you touched it with your hands before washing them. Avoid turning off the faucet with your clean hands. Instead, use an elbow or paper towel to turn off the water. Then dispose of the towel in the proper waste receptacle.^[11]

7 Repeat the process often. You should wash your hands anytime they appear dirty. But there are also some

situations that also require washing your hands. These include:^[12]

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- 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, its food, or animal waste
- After touching garbage

8 Apply moisturizer to prevent chapping. Hands that are washed frequently are prone to dryness and chapping. Rub a moisturizer liberally over your hands once you've finished washing them.^[13]

- Patting your hands dry instead of rubbing them can also help prevent chapping.

Method
2

Using Hand Sanitizer

1 Choose the most effective hand sanitizer. In some cases, you may not have running water or soap to keep germs off of your hands. If this happens, you can use a hand sanitizer to clean them of germs. Be aware that hand sanitizers are not as effective as soap if your hands are visibly dirty or greasy and do not eliminate all types of germs.^[14]

- Get an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. You can also use antimicrobial wipes or towelettes. These should also contain a high percentage of alcohol.

2 Apply sanitizer in one palm. Open your product and squirt enough of the product to wet both hands completely. If you're using wipes or towelettes, open two so that you have one for each hand.^[15]

- Check the back of your sanitizer packing. It may have recommendations for how much of the product to use for both hands.^[16] One teaspoon of sanitizer is generally enough to cover both hands.^[17]

3 Cover all surfaces of your hand with the sanitizer. After you've applied the sanitizer to one palm or opened a towelette, cover every surface of your hands with the product. Be sure to get the front and back of your hand as well as between fingers and under your fingernails.^[18]

- Observe if you have every surface of your hands by noticing that they appear or feel wet.

4 Rub the product into your hands until they are dry. Keep rubbing the sanitizer into your hands until the product dries. This ensure that it kills as many germs as possible.^[19]

- Let the sanitizer dry on your hands if you're using wipes or towelettes. It usually takes about 30 seconds for sanitizer to dry on your hands.^[20]

5 Wash with soap and water as soon as possible. Even if you disinfect with hand sanitizer, germs can still linger on your hands. In order to ensure that you're hands are germ free, wash them with soap and water as soon as you are able.^[21] Remember that you should wash or sanitize your hands:^[22]

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- 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, its food, or animal waste

- After touching garbage

Method
3

Keeping Germs Off Your Hands

1 Place a tissue over your nose and mouth. If you are coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue. This can prevent germs from spreading to your hands or to other people.^[23]

- Use the crook of your elbow to cover your nose and mouth if you don't have a tissue. Avoid using your hand to cover them because this may come in contact with your eyes or other surfaces that could infect you or other people.^[24]
- Dispose of the tissue into a proper wastebasket as soon as you can. Wash your clothing as soon as possible, too.^[25]

2 Limit contact with sick individuals. If you are taking care of someone who is sick or in a space with an ill individual, keep your distance as much as possible. Hugging a sick person or even just washing his or her dishes can transmit germs to your hands.^[26]

- Wash or sanitize your hands thoroughly if you come in contact with a sick individual or any surfaces they may have touched.

3 Avoid sharing with someone who is sick. You might think that sharing things such as clean utensils and clothing with a sick person won't transmit germs to your hands. But you can just as easily infect yourself by using common items. Don't share items with others who are or may be sick.^[27]

- Wash any laundry in a washing machine. Use warm or hot water and detergent. Consider adding bleach to the load. Make sure to wash your hands after you've placed the laundry in the machine.^[28]
- Use your own utensils when eating. The ill individual should use separate utensils. Wash eating utensils in a dishwasher or by hand with soap and hot water. You can also use disposable utensils to prevent the spread of germs.^[29]

4 Disinfect shared surfaces. You can also get germs on your hands by touching shared surfaces. Disinfecting these surfaces often can keep your hands from getting germs.^[30]

- Clean surfaces with anti-septic or anti-bacterial cleansers. You can also mix 1 teaspoon of bleach to 2 quarts or liters of water to disinfect surfaces.
- Wear gloves as you disinfect surfaces and throw them away when you're done.

5 Keep your hands to yourself. It's easy to get germs on your hands in crowded, common public spaces. Avoid touching unknown surfaces as much as you can and then wash or sanitize your hands as soon as possible.^[31]

Some common surfaces to only touch if you must include:

- Handles in public transportation
- Doorknobs
- Telephones
- Elevator buttons

6 Teach children good hygiene habits. It's also important for your kids to keep their hands germ-free. This is especially true if they go to daycare or school. Making sure your children know when to wash their hands may prevent illness or infections.^[32]

- Make your "lessons" a fun time for your children. Ask, "Who knows if we need to wash our hands after playing?" Give your kids treats for getting the answer right. It doesn't need to be anything big, but a small candy or a gold star can go a long way in reinforcing what you're teaching.
- Explain why it's important for your kids to wash their hands. You can say, "Not washing your hands after you use the potty can spread icky germs that make you sick. If you get sick, you won't be able to go to the playground with your sister. The icky germs might even make everyone in the house sick."

- Keep in mind that children often forget to wash their hands, even if you've told them often. Repeat the message or ask any time your kids use the bathroom, play outside, come home from school or daycare, or if they are sick.

Sources and Citations

1. <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p4/p42052.pdf>
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
3. <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

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