



CLEAN HANDS SAVE LIVES

Handwashing versus Hand Sanitizing

Our mothers taught us, signs in most public restrooms remind us - wash your hands. Now hand sanitizing stations are popping up in public places - even many grocery stores offer complimentary sanitizing wipes to use on your shopping cart. But do you know when you should clean your hands and which method is best?

Like the old adage, mother knows best about handwashing. According to the CDC, hand sanitizers don't kill ALL types of germs, such as norovirus, some parasites, and *Clostridium difficile*, which causes severe diarrhea. Hand sanitizers may not remove harmful chemicals, such as pesticides and heavy metals like lead. Handwashing reduces the amounts of all types of germs, pesticides, and metals on hands. Knowing when to clean your hands and which method to use gives you the best chance of preventing sickness.

Emergency situations like natural disasters, severe weather or any number of unexpected circumstances can make finding running water difficult. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to reduce health risks until you can wash your hands properly. This is especially critical if you lend a helping hand in an emergency situation. Our hands are a main pathway for germ transmission to others, directly or indirectly.

When should you wash your hands?

It may seem like common sense, but sometimes our hands come in contact with things we don't experience every day. Here are some examples of things you know and others you might not.

- Before preparing or eating food
- After going to the bathroom
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- After handling uncooked foods, particularly raw meat, poultry, or fish
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After handling an animal or animal waste
- After handling garbage
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After handling items contaminated by flood water or sewage

Washing with soap and water

1. Place your hands together under water (warm water if possible).
2. Rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds (with soap if possible). Wash all surfaces well, including wrists, palms, backs of hands, fingers, and under the fingernails.
3. Clean the dirt from under your fingernails.
4. Rinse the soap from your hands.
5. Dry your hands completely with a clean towel if possible (this helps remove the germs). However, if towels are not available it is okay to air dry your hands.
6. Pat your skin rather than rubbing to avoid chapping and cracking.
7. If you use a disposable towel, throw it in the trash.

Remember: If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Using alcohol-based hand sanitizers

When your hands are visibly dirty, you should wash them with soap and clean, warm running water when available. However, if soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

1. Apply product to the palm of one hand.
2. Rub hands together.
3. Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until your hands are dry.

Note: The amount of sanitizer needed to reduce the number of germs on hands varies by product.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

For more information go to <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/> and <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/handhygienefacts.html>