

Infection Prevention and You



Clean your hands often!

May 5 is the World Health Organization's World Hand Hygiene Day. Hand hygiene (washing with soap and water or using hand sanitizer) is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infections. Because it is the number one way to stop the spread of germs, it is important to clean your hands often. Remember: CLEAN HANDS COUNT for safe healthcare!

When should I wash my hands?

Many illnesses can be prevented with regular hand hygiene using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Clean your hands often, and request that others do the same.

- Before eating
- Before, during, and after preparing food
- After using the bathroom
- After coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose, or caring for someone who is ill
- After taking out the garbage
- After petting animals
- When visiting someone who is sick
- *Whenever your hands look or feel dirty*

How do I wash my hands correctly?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

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. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
3. **Scrub your hands** for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
4. **Rinse your hands** well under clean, running water.
5. **Dry your hands** using a clean towel or air dry them, and use a paper towel to turn off the faucet, and then throw it away.

How do I clean my hands without soap or water?

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but sanitizers do not eliminate all types of germs.

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

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I didn't see my healthcare provider or visitors wash their hands. Now what?

Scary but true: It has been estimated that fewer than half of healthcare workers clean their hands as often as they are supposed to. Germs on healthcare workers' hands can transmit dangerous organisms to patients. Did you see your healthcare providers or visitors wash their hands? If not, ask politely them to wash again (e.g., "Do you mind cleaning your hands again before the exam?"). Please speak up for your care. Don't be shy. After all, we're talking about your health.

Additional resources

APIC consumer alert—Holiday hand hygiene <http://www.apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=holiday-hand-hygiene>

APIC: Infection Prevention and You—Clean Hands Stop Germs <http://consumers.site.apic.org/get-social-with-apic/clean-hands-stop-germs/>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—"Clean Hands Count" <http://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene>

World Health Organization—Clean hands protect against infection http://www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en/

World Health Organization—SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands <http://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/en/>

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