

Infection Prevention and You



Hand hygiene and antimicrobial stewardship

May 5 is World Hand Hygiene Day: The World Health Organization's (WHO) annual global call to action for health workers. This year's theme is "Fight antibiotic resistance—it's in your hands." So, what can you do to protect yourself and your family from the spread of harmful antibiotic resistant germs? You can pledge to wash your hands.

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; and
- *Whenever your hands look or feel dirty!*

What hand hygiene products should I use?

Keeping your hands clean is the number one way to prevent the spread of infection. Here are a few things to consider when choosing a hand hygiene product.

- **Plain soap and water** is one of the best ways to remove germs from your hands. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the following are steps to properly washing your hands: wet, lather, scrub, rinse, and dry.
- **Alcohol sanitizer** is good to use if soap and water are not available. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60 percent alcohol can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but sanitizers do not eliminate all types of germs. It's great to carry a small dispenser with you when you are out shopping, at the grocery store, in an airport, or on a plane.
- **Antimicrobial soap** is used in healthcare settings like doctor's offices, dentists, or hospitals. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), it is not necessary to use antibacterial soaps at home.

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What is antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotic resistance happens when bacteria change in a way that reduces or eliminates the ability of antibiotics to kill that bacteria. Washing your hands will help keep you healthy and prevent your need for antibiotics. But if you get sick, do not pressure your healthcare provider for antibiotics. If you are prescribed antibiotics, take all of them—even if you start to feel better.

Here are some other ways to celebrate World Hand Hygiene Day.

You can commit to always cough into your sleeve and not your hands. You can play handwashing games by singing a song for children when they wash their hands. You can make handwashing a routine and important part of your daily life to prevent the spread of harmful germs in your home.

Please join us on May 5 in celebrating the importance of clean hands worldwide to stop the spread of antimicrobial resistance!

Additional resources

- APIC consumer alert—Clean your hands often! <http://www.apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=clean-your-hands-often>
- APIC Infection Prevention and You—Clean Hands Stop Germs <http://consumers.site.apic.org/get-social-with-apic/clean-hands-stop-germs/>
- APIC Infection Prevention and You—Clean your hands often <http://consumers.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/wash-your-hands-often/>
- APIC Infection Prevention and You—Know when antibiotics are appropriate <http://professionals.site.apic.org/10-ways-to-protect-patients/know-when-antibiotics-are-appropriate/>
- The CDC—Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>
- The WHO—SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands <http://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/en/>
- The FDA—Antibacterial Soap? You Can Skip It -- Use Plain Soap and Water <https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm378393.htm>