

**Wash Your Hands!**

How you wash and dry your hands makes a difference:

- Use soap and warm or hot running water.
- Wash for at least 15 seconds.
- Wash all surfaces, including wrists, palms, backs of hands, between fingers, and as much as possible under fingernails, by rubbing vigorously.
- Rinse hands under running water.
- Away from home, dry hands with disposable paper towels or the hot air blower.

At home, provide a separate towel for each member of the household, and wash towels regularly in hot water and detergent.

**When should I wash my hands?****Before you:**

- Eat
- Prepare food for yourself or others
- Treat a break or cut in the skin
- Care for an ill or injured person or animal
- Insert or remove contact lenses

**Immediately after you:**

- Use the restroom
- Handle uncooked foods (especially raw meat poultry or fish)
- Change a diaper
- Blow your nose, sneeze, or cough
- Touch an animal (especially a reptile), including animals in petting zoos and fairs.

**Why is handwashing important?**

Your skin constantly makes oil that stays on its surface. Germs that get on your skin are trapped in the oil. Skin does not have to look dirty to be loaded with tiny germs that can cause big problems – like the common cold, diarrhea, and more serious diseases. Washing your hands with soap and warm running water is one of the best and easiest things you can do to stay healthy.

**But I wash my hands a lot –**

We are all in a hurry – to eat, get back to work, make that important meeting or class. Too often we forget or “don’t have time,” or we think a quick cold-water rinse will do. But that doesn’t “cut it”...literally!

Oils, and any attached germs, must be removed from the skin. A splash of cold water and a quick rub with a towel doesn’t do much good. You need to use warm water and soap to get the oil and germs off your skin.

When you’ve been touching things many people have handled, routine handwashing can help reduce your chances of getting an infection.

**Should I use antibacterial soap?**

The most important thing to remember is to wash with warm running water and soap. If you want to use antibacterial soap, keep in mind that it helps kill some germs – but not all. Some germs can’t be killed, no matter how strong the soap is or how long it is on your hands. You may not always have special soap with you. That is why it’s very important to spend enough time and care to wash germs away.

You may wish to use an antimicrobial soap or alcohol based hand rub if you are ill or caring for someone who is, or has a weakened immune system.

To do the most good, washing your hands has to become a habit. You're more likely to learn a new habit and stick with it if it's easy. Most of the time, proper handwashing is easy.

**Should I use towelettes?**

Antimicrobial towelettes may be used in place of regular soap and water. They are not as effective as alcohol based hand rubs or antimicrobial soaps, so are not a substitute for them.

**Can I use a waterless hand sanitizer lotion or gel with alcohol?**

Using this type of product is ok, except when hands look dirty; then washing your hands with soap and warm water is a must. Alcohol is not as effective at killing germs when dirt is present.

When using, use the amount of an alcohol-based hand rub recommended by the manufacturer. Apply the product to the palm of one hand, and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers, until hands are dry.