

CDC Features

Wash Your Hands

Language:

English



Keeping hands clean is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infection and illness.

Handwashing is easy to do and it's one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many types of infection and illness in all settings—from your [home](#) and [workplace](#) to child care facilities and [hospitals](#). Clean hands can stop germs from spreading from one person to another and throughout an entire community.

Learn more about when and how to wash your hands.



When should you wash your hands?

- **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, animal feed, or animal waste
- **After** touching garbage

What is the right way to wash your hands?



- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- **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.
- **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

[Why? Read the science behind the recommendations](#)



What should you do if you don't have soap and clean, running water?

Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to reduce the number of microbes on them in most situations. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of microbes on hands in some situations, but sanitizers do **not** eliminate all types of germs.

Hand sanitizers may not be as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy.

How do you use hand sanitizers?

- Apply the product to the palm of one hand (read the label to learn the correct amount).
- Rub your hands together.
- Rub the product over all surfaces of your hands and fingers until your hands are dry.

[Why? Read the science behind the recommendations](#)

For more information on handwashing, please visit CDC's [Handwashing website](#). You can also call 1-800-CDC-INFO or [contact CDC-INFO](#) for answers to specific questions.