



Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives

When & How to Wash Your Hands

[Esta página en español \(/handwashing/esp/when-how-handwashing.html\)](/handwashing/esp/when-how-handwashing.html)

Keeping hands clean through improved hand hygiene is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water. If clean, running water is not accessible, as is common in many parts of the world, use soap and available water. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean 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 handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching garbage

How should you 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. (</handwashing/show-me-the-science-handwashing.html>)

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 are not 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. (</handwashing/show-me-the-science-hand-sanitizer.html>)

Page last reviewed: October 17, 2014

Page last updated: October 17, 2014

Content source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1600 Clifton Road Atlanta, GA
30329-4027, USA
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) TTY: (888) 232-6348 - [Contact CDC-INFO](#)

