Hand Hygiene

Washing Your Hands to Prevent Spreading Germs

Washing your hands is one of the best ways to prevent germs from spreading. It is simple and easy, and can often prevent illness-causing germs from spreading among family members and throughout one's community. Unclean hands can spread germs to others and yourself by touching your mouth, nose, and eyes.

When to Wash Your Hands

- Before, during, and after you prepare food to eat
- Before you eat a meal or food items
- Before inserting or removing contact lenses
- After using the bathroom or changing a diaper
- After handling uncooked food items, especially meats, poultry, and/or fish
- After handling animals or animal waste
- After you blow your nose, sneeze, or cough
- After handling garbage or dirty/soiled laundry
- When your hands are visibly dirty or after touching dirty objects
- More often when you or someone in your household are sick

Alcohol-based Hand Gels (Sanitizers)

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective at reducing germs on your hands, but cannot remove dirt or other contaminants on your hands. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are fast acting and reduce the amount of bacteria on your hands better than handwashing with soap and water. However, visibly soiled hands should always be washed with soap and water!

Handwashing with Soap and Water

Washing your hands with soap and water is the only way to effectively clean visibly soiled hands. Wet your hands and apply liquid or clean bar soap, followed by vigorously rubbing your hands together for at least 15-20 seconds. Rinse your hand with running water and dry using a paper towel or cloth. In public restrooms, use paper towels to turn off the water faucet handle on the sink and to open the restroom door.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT
WWW.CDC.GOV/HANDWASHING