

# How Washing Your Hands Keeps You Healthy

How to

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Hand sanitizer

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Takeaway

## Why is handwashing important?

Germs spread from surfaces to people when we touch a surface and then touch our face with unwashed hands.

Proper handwashing is the best way to protect yourself and others from being exposed to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

To combat COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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recommends regularly washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, particularly if you've been in a public area or have sneezed, coughed, or blown your nose.

Washing your hands properly with soap and running water can stave off illnesses that affect healthy people, as well as those with weakened immune systems.

Handwashing can protect you from COVID-19 and respiratory infections, such as pneumonia, and gastric infections that cause diarrhea. Many of these conditions can be fatal to some people, such as older adults, those with weakened immune systems, babies, and children. You can pass on these germs, even if you're not sick.

## **What's the best way to wash your hands?**

Washing your hands with soap and water has been found to reduce more bacteria than washing with water alone. Antibacterial soap may not be necessary to use every day at home outside of healthcare settings. Regular soap and water can be effective.

## Washing your hands



**Wet hands** with clean **water** and apply enough **soap** to cover all hand surfaces



Rub hands **palm to palm** in a circular motion



**Palm over back** of hand with interlaced fingers, then switch hands in a back-and-forth motion



**Palm to palm** with interlaced fingers in a back-and-forth motion



**Back of fingers** to opposing palms, with fingers interlocked in a back-and-forth motion



Clasp **thumb** with opposite hand using a rotational motion



Rub **tips of fingers** on opposite hand in a circular motion



Grab your **wrist** with opposite hand using a rotational motion



**Rinse hands** with clean water



**Dry** thoroughly with clean towel



Use **towel** to turn off faucet, or use your elbow

Steps for washing hands effectively include:

1. Rinse your hands under running water at a comfortable temperature. Warm water isn't more effective than cold water at killing germs.
2. Apply the type of soap you like best. Soaps to try include liquid formulas, foams, and those with added moisturizers.
3. Work up a lather for half a minute or longer. Make sure to spread the lather on all parts of your hands and wrists, including under your fingernails and between your fingers.
4. Rinse and dry thoroughly.
5. If you're using a public bathroom, use a paper towel both to turn off the faucet and turn the door handle when exiting.

## When to wash your hands

Frequent handwashing is a hygiene habit you should practice every day.

Wash your hands after you've been in a public place or have touched a surface that's been touched by multiple people, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following surfaces are often touched by many people:

- doorknobs

- railings
- outdoor dumpsters or trash cans
- light switches
- gas pumps
- cash registers
- touch screens
- shopping carts or baskets

You should also wash your hands in the following situations:

## **For food prep and eating**

- before, during, and after preparing or cooking food, which is especially important if you touch raw chicken, eggs, meat, or fish
- before eating or drinking

## **For personal care, intimate activities, and first aid**

- after using the toilet, both at home or in a public restroom
- after changing a baby's diaper or helping a small child use the toilet
- before changing contact lenses
- after blowing your nose, sneezing, or coughing, especially if you're sick
- before taking medications, such as pills or eye drops
- after sexual or intimate activity
- before treating a burn or wound, either on yourself or someone else

- after tending to a person who is ill

## **High-traffic places and dirty objects**

- before and after using public transportation, especially if you hold onto the railings on buses and subways
- after handling money or receipts
- after handling household or commercial garbage
- after coming into contact with visibly dirty surfaces, or when your hands are visibly dirty

## **Healthcare and other settings**

- before and after treating patients if you're a medical professional such as a doctor, X-ray technician, or chiropractor
- before and after treating clients if you're a cosmetologist, beautician, tattoo artist, or aesthetician
- before and after entering a hospital, doctor's office, nursing home, or another type of medical facility

## **Pet care**

- after feeding your pet, especially if they eat raw food
- after walking your dog or handling animal waste

# When and how to use hand sanitizer

## FDA Notice

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has announced

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recalls of several hand sanitizers due to the potential presence of methanol.

## Methanol

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is a toxic alcohol that can have adverse effects, such as nausea, vomiting, or headache, when a significant amount is used on the skin. More serious effects, such as blindness, seizures, or damage to the nervous system, can occur if methanol is ingested. Drinking hand sanitizer containing methanol,

either accidentally or purposely, can be fatal. See [here](#) for more information on how to spot safe hand sanitizers.

If you purchased any hand sanitizer containing methanol, you should stop using it immediately. Return it to the store where you purchased it, if possible. If you experienced any adverse effects from using it, you should call your healthcare provider. If your symptoms are life threatening, call emergency medical services immediately.

Hand sanitizers are available as wipes and in gel form. They're a convenient on-the-go option to use when soap and running water aren't readily available.

However, they shouldn't be used regularly instead of handwashing, since soap and water are more appropriate for regularly removing dirt, debris, and harmful germs than hand sanitizers.

Using hand sanitizers too frequently can also reduce the number of helpful bacteria on your hands and skin.

Make the most of hand sanitizer by keeping these things in mind:

- Use alcohol-based products. It's important to check ingredients and use a sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Ethanol alcohol and isopropanol alcohol are both acceptable types.



- Scrub your hands. Use the amount of hand sanitizer recommended on the label, and rub it into both hands vigorously. Make sure to get all areas of the hands, including the wrists and under the nails, just as you do when washing. Rub until they air dry.
- Have some within reach. It's a good idea to keep some hand sanitizer with you. It can come in handy when you walk your dog, travel, or attend class.

# Handwashing tips

## Keep your skin clean and moisturized

Of course, too much of a good thing can have negative consequences — and this counts for handwashing, too.

Washing your hands constantly until they're dry, red, and rough might mean that you're overdoing it. If your hands become cracked or bleed, they may be more prone to infection from germs and bacteria.

To avoid dryness, try using a moisturizing soap such as glycerin, or use a hand cream or lotion after washing your hands.

## Consider your soap and storage

Since germs can live on poorly stored bar soap, liquid soap may be a better alternative. Liquid soaps should be used rather than bar soaps in schools and daycare settings.

## **Don't go overboard**

In some people, including children, overly frequent handwashing may be a sign of anxiety or a condition called obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

# **Handwashing tips for kids**

Whether you're a teacher, caregiver, or parent, it can be hard to get kids to wash their hands efficiently. Here are several tips and tricks that might help:

- Pick your child's favorite song and have them sing it while washing their hands. If it's a short song, have them sing it twice. They can try it once in their own voice and once as a character they love.
- Make up a song or poem that includes all the steps of good handwashing and recite it with your child often, especially after using the toilet and before meals.
- Make sure the sink is within reach of little legs and hands, at home and school.
- Use fun soaps. These can include foam, liquid soap that changes color, and those that have child-friendly scents or brightly colored bottles.
- Play a game of thumb war or finger-spell with your child while handwashing.

# Takeaway

Washing your hands with regular soap and running water is a highly effective way to stop the spread of germs and bacteria, including COVID-19.

It's important to wash your hands before and after handling food or eating. Regular, nonantibacterial soap is fine for most everyday use.

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