

How to clean your hands

Use soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser to clean your hands regularly. This can help stop the spread of bacteria and viruses that cause infections, including [colds](#), [flu](#), [norovirus](#) and [COVID-19](#).

Many hand sanitisers are alcohol-based and highly flammable. Do not use alcohol-based sanitiser near heat or a naked flame.

How to wash your hands with soap and water

1. Wet your hands with warm water and put on soap.
2. Rub your hands together palm-to-palm until the soap forms a lather.
3. Rub the back of one hand with your palm and fingers spread so you wash between the fingers. Repeat with the other hand.
4. Interlock the top of your hands and rub your fingertips - this cleans your fingertips and knuckles.
5. Then finally hold your thumb tightly and twist to make sure your thumbs are cleaned. Repeat with the other hand.
6. Rinse your hands under running water.
7. Dry your hands with a clean towel or paper towel.

It takes at least 20 seconds to wash your hands well. If you have dry skin or a skin condition, apply moisturiser after washing your hands and at night.

How to properly wash your hands

Hand hygiene at home

When you're at home or not in hospital, make sure you clean your hands:

- before you prepare food, handle food or eat
- after touching raw meat
- after you use the toilet
- once you clean up after your pet
- after you use public transport
- when you get home after meeting lots of people

Cleaning your hands can help you avoid:

- [colds](#) and [flu](#)
- tummy bugs that cause diarrhoea, such as [norovirus](#)
- eye infections such as conjunctivitis
- [COVID-19](#)
- superbugs such as [MRSA](#) and [VRE](#)

Many of these infections are common in children. Parents and childcare workers should always make sure children clean their hands regularly.

[How to protect yourself and others from COVID-19](#)

Hand hygiene in healthcare settings

Every day in Ireland, hundreds of people get sick because of healthcare associated infections. These infections can cause serious illness and sometimes even death.

Important

About 30% to 50% of infections that start in hospitals can be avoided.

Patients

If you're a patient with an infection, staff will support you and tell you how to reduce the spread of bacteria (bugs). Follow all the steps that they give you.

To stop getting or spreading infections:

- clean your hands often
- clean your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before eating
- use your own soap, flannel, sponge and razor
- avoid sharing food, newspapers or other personal items with patients
- limit contact with patients and keep away from their bed space
- tell staff if facilities in a hospital or clinic are not clean

When you go home, the risk of you spreading bugs is much lower. But you should still keep hands and toilets clean at all times.

Visitors

If you're visiting a patient, clean your hands when you enter the ward and when you leave. If you're visiting for a long time or helping a patient, clean your hands regularly while you're there. You can use soap and water or an alcohol hand rub.

If there is any dirt on your hands or under your fingernails, use soap and water. You can then make sure they are properly clean by using alcohol hand rub.

[How handwashing stops the spread of infection \(Video\)](#)

Vaccines

Vaccinations reduce infections and protect you and your family. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if your child has had all their routine injections.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you think you need this year's flu vaccine or a vaccine to protect from pneumonia. This is especially important for older people or those with long-term health conditions.

Find out more about:

- [vaccines](#)
- [the COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [antibiotic resistance](#)

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