

Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Proper hand washing can significantly reduce the spread of infectious diseases among both children and adults.

Proper hand-washing techniques

Good hand-washing techniques include washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Antimicrobial wipes or towelettes are just as effective as soap and water in cleaning your hands but aren't as good as alcohol-based sanitizers. Antibacterial soaps are no more effective at killing germs than are regular soap and water and may lead to the development of bacteria that are resistant to the products. In general, regular soap is fine.

Proper hand washing with soap and water

Wet your hands with warm, running water (cold water is not as effective at killing bacteria as warm water) and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Lather well.

Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 seconds this will loosen bacteria; scrub all surfaces including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails. Rinse well.

Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel, making sure your hands are completely dry

Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Proper use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer

If soap and water are not available, use gel hand sanitizers or alcohol-based hand wipes. Alcohol rubs/gels/rinses are excellent hand antiseptics, provided they contain more than 60% alcohol. They're actually more effective than soap and water in killing bacteria and viruses that cause disease. Using these products can result in less skin dryness and irritation than hand washing.

Apply about 1/2 tsp, of the product (the size of a quarter) to the palm of your hand. Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.

Kids need clean hands, too

You can help your children avoid getting sick by insisting that they wash their hands properly and frequently. To get kids into the habit, teach by example. Tell your children to wash their hands for as long as it takes them to sing their ABCs, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" or the "Happy Birthday" song. This works especially well with younger children, who may rush when washing their hands. Hand washing is especially important for children who attend daycare. To protect your child's health, be sure your daycare provider promotes sound hygiene, including frequent hand washing. Older children and adolescents can use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

Mistakes to avoid regarding hand washing?

Don't use a single damp cloth to wash a group of children's hands.

Don't use a standing basin of water to rinse hands.

Don't use a common hand towel. Always use disposable towels in day care or for food preparation

Don't use sponges or non-disposable cleaning cloths. Remember that germs thrive on moist surfaces.

