



HAND WASHING

What is proper HAND WASHING?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends washing hands often and vigorously with soap and warm, running water for at least 15 seconds.

Why is proper hand washing important?

Properly washing hands is one of the “most important means of preventing the spread of infection,” according to the CDC. When we touch our noses, mouths, eyes and open wounds with unwashed hands, we risk spreading germs, viruses and diseases that cause diarrhea, colds and other more serious (sometimes even life-threatening) diseases.

When should hands be washed?

Always wash your hands:

- Before eating;
- After using the bathroom;
- After changing diapers;
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing;
- Any time they are visibly soiled;
- Before and after preparing or eating food (especially after food preparation when raw meats, poultry or fish are involved);
- Before treating cuts or wounds, or tending to the sick;
- Before inserting or removing contact lenses;
- After handling garbage or soil (including yard work);
- After touching animals (including household pets) or discarding their waste; and
- Before and after visiting any hospital, doctor’s office or clinic.

What steps should one follow to correctly washing hands?

- Use soap and warm, running water.
- Wash all surfaces thoroughly, including wrists, palms, backs of hands, fingers and under fingernails.
- Rub soapy hands together for at least 10 to 15 seconds.
- Use clean or disposable towels to dry hands.
- To avoid chapping and cracking, pat the skin rather than rubbing it.
- Apply hand lotion afterwards to soothe dry skin.
- Carry an alcohol-based sanitizer in your bag or car for the times you do not have access to soap or water, and use it frequently throughout the day.



Frequently Asked Questions

What are the five common household scenarios through which contaminated hands can spread disease-causing germs?

Hands to food - Germs are transmitted from unclean hands to food, usually by an infected food preparer who did not wash hands after using the toilet. The germs pass to those who eat the food.

Infected infant to hands to other children - During diaper changing, germs pass from an infant with diarrhea to the hands of the parent or caregiver. If the person changing the diaper skips washing his or her hands before handling another child, the germs that cause diarrhea pass to the second child.

Food to hands to food - Germs from uncooked foods such as chicken are transferred to hands and then to other foods, such as salad. Cooking the raw food kills the initial germs, but the salad remains contaminated.

Nose, mouth, or eyes to hands to others - Germs that cause colds, eye infections, and other illnesses spread to the hands by sneezing, coughing, or rubbing the eyes. Germs then pass to other family members or friends.

Food to hands to infants - Germs from uncooked foods are transferred to hands and then to infants. For example, if a parent or caregiver handles raw chicken and does not wash his or her hands before tending to an infant, they can transfer germs such as salmonella to the infant.

References and Sources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Delaware Division of Public Health's Office of Food Protection and Bureau of Epidemiology.