

Why is hand washing important?

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

What types of disease can good hand washing prevent?

1. Diseases spread through fecal-oral transmission. Infections that may be transmitted through this route include salmonellosis, shigellosis, hepatitis A, giardiasis, enterovirus, amebiasis, and campylobacteriosis. Because these diseases are spread through the ingestion of even the tiniest particles of fecal material, hand washing after using the toilet cannot be over-emphasized.
2. Diseases spread through indirect contact with respiratory secretions. Microorganisms that may be transmitted through this route include influenza, *Streptococcus*, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and the common cold. Because these diseases may be spread indirectly by hands contaminated by respiratory discharges of infected people, illness may be avoided by washing hands after coughing or sneezing and after shaking hands with an individual who has been coughing and sneezing.
3. Diseases may also be spread when hands are contaminated with urine, saliva or other moist body substances. Microorganisms, which may be transmitted by one or more body substances, include cytomegalovirus, typhoid, staphylococcal organisms, and Epstein-Barr virus. These germs may be transmitted from person to person or indirectly by contamination of food or inanimate objects such as toys.

What is good hand washing technique?

There is more to hand washing than you think! By rubbing your hands vigorously with soapy water, you pull the dirt and the oily soils free from your skin. The soap lather suspends both the dirt and germs trapped inside and are then quickly washed away.

Follow these four simple steps to keeping hands clean:

1. Wet your hands with warm running water.
2. Add soap, then rub your hands together, making a soapy lather. Do this away from the running water for at least 10 seconds, being careful not to wash the lather away. Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
3. Rinse your hands well under warm running water. Let the water run back into the sink, not down to your elbows.
4. Dry hands thoroughly with a clean towel. Then turn off the water with a clean paper towel and dispose in a proper receptacle.

What type of soap should be used?

Any type of soap may be used. However, bar soap should be kept in a self draining holder that is cleaned thoroughly before new bars are put out and liquid soap containers (which must be used in day care centers) should be used until empty and cleaned before refilling.

To prevent chapping use a mild soap with warm water; pat rather than rub hands dry; and apply lotion liberally and frequently.

What are some mistakes I should 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 food preparation settings.
- DON'T use sponges or non-disposable cleaning cloths unless you launder them on a regular basis, adding chlorine bleach to the wash water. Remember that germs thrive on moist surfaces!

What are some ways to help children with good hand washing technique?

It is important to encourage and help children to wash hands before eating, after playing outdoors or playing with pets, after using the bathroom, and after blowing their noses. Even though hands may appear to be clean, they may carry germs or microorganisms that are capable of causing disease.

Don't assume that children know how to wash their hands properly. Supervision, especially in a day care setting, is an essential element in forming good hand washing habits in children.

Finally, children learn by example! Let them observe good hand washing technique from the adults who care for them.

May I use the over-the-counter alcohol gels for washing my hands instead of using soap and water?

These products, which can be found wherever soap is sold, are very effective at killing germs on the hands as long as your hands are not visibly dirty. They should be used when soap and water are not readily available.

To use correctly, apply about a teaspoonful of the alcohol gel on the palm of one hand. Then rub all over both hands, making sure you rub the front, back, and fingernail areas of both hands. Let the alcohol dry, which should take about 30 seconds.

If your hands look dirty but you have no other way to wash your hands, use the gel but wash with soap and water as soon as you can.