

Clean hands for *healthy living*



How many times over the past several years have you, a family member or someone you know had a touch of the 24-hour stomach flu?

Chances are that it was actually food borne illness and you got it from someone not washing their hands before preparing food.

The facts about food and illness

- At least 76 million cases of food-related illness occur every year.
- At least 50 million of these are caused by viruses.
- Viruses in food come from human feces.
- Nearly a third of the population does not wash their hands after using a public toilet.
- The population that gets the sickest are those older than 65 and younger than 5.

Children and seniors are most likely to get very ill and potentially die from food borne illnesses caused by bacteria and viruses. The unfortunate part is that many of these illnesses can be prevented by proper handwashing at the correct time.

What is a soiled hand?

Soiled hands commonly result from a variety of activities. Some, such as working in the garden, produce visible soiling. Many others—such as petting a dog, handling foods, changing a diaper, using the restroom, or touching a door knob—produce little or no visible soiling. Yet, transient bacteria and viruses may be present on visibly unsoiled hands.

What is proper handwashing?

Water alone may remove some of the visible soil, but soap is needed to help remove the unseen, transient bacteria and viruses that may be on skin after activities, such as changing a diaper or touching a door knob. Scrubbing with soap and water loosens these potential disease-causing micro-organisms from skin so they can be washed away when the hands are rinsed.

Practice these handwashing steps

1. Wet hands with comfortably warm water.
2. Apply a small amount of soap or use a bar.
3. Rub hands together until all areas are soapy and scrubbed.
4. Scrub for 15 to 20 seconds singing your favorite birthday song twice or two lyrics to “Twinkle, twinkle little star” once.
5. Rinse with warm water removing the soap and bacteria/viruses.
6. Dry with a paper towel.

Know the facts about handwashing

Several common misconceptions exist about how often hands should be washed, water temperature, soap choices, and the best way to dry hands.

Wash hands whenever they feel soiled and at these times:

- After you might have come in contact with fecal material. This is always after using the restroom, changing any kind of diaper, or petting an animal.
- Anytime you might have come in contact with juices from uncooked meats and poultry. These animal products may be contaminated with a variety of illness-causing bacteria.
- Before preparing foods and before eating.
- Anytime you come in contact with crowds or frequently handled items, such as money, bingo markers, counters, and door handles.

Use comfortably warm water.

- While most soaps work in the 45° to 130°F range, the most effective range is 98° to 110°F.
- Water that is too hot or too cold results in quick, ineffective washing. Water that is too hot also removes some of the natural skin oils, resulting in cracked dry skin which will shed more bacteria.

Know the differences between soaps and sanitizers

- Soaps have become complex mixtures of chemicals with varying functions.
- Antibacterial soaps contain a chemical that is effective against a variety of bacteria. However, it is the action of scrubbing (not the type of soap) that physically removes bacteria from the skin. Also remember that antibacterial soaps are ineffective against most viruses.
- Both bar and liquid soaps can effectively remove bacteria from the skin. However, bar soaps need to partially dry between uses instead of being allowed to sit in a “soap soup.”
- Hand sanitizers are mainly alcohol which kills bacteria and some viruses after a minimum of 15 seconds contact time. They are effective against respiratory viruses but not against intestinal viruses.

- Hand sanitizers are ineffective on soiled hands.
- Dishwashing detergent is formulated to aggressively remove soil from dishes. It is too harsh for frequent use on hands and will cause skin to dry and crack.
- The area under fingernails has the highest potential for harboring bacteria and viruses. Well-trimmed nails collect less soil and are easier to keep clean.

Dry hands properly.

- Using a disposable towel is the best way to prevent recontamination when drying your hands.
- Cloth towels that are used to dry hands have been found to have very high contamination levels. They often stay damp and warm, thus allowing many different bacteria to grow. When used on clean hands, these contaminated cloths will re-contaminate the clean hands.
- Remember to use the paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door when leaving the rest room.
- Practicing good handwashing will protect you, your family, and others you meet from a variety of food borne and other types of illnesses.

Be clean, be healthy, follow these steps:

1. Wet hands with warm water.
2. Lather with good old soap and rub your hands together for 20 seconds.
3. Wash between your fingers and around and under your nails.
4. Rinse with warm water.
5. Dry with a paper towel.

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File: FN 1

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