

Hand washing to prevent infection

Hand washing is a simple habit, something most people do without thinking. Yet hand washing, when done properly, is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick. This simple habit requires only soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Antibacterial soaps have become increasingly popular in recent years. However, these soaps are no more effective at killing germs than is regular soap. Using antibacterial soaps may lead to the development of bacteria that are resistant to the products' antimicrobial agents — making it even harder to kill these germs in the future. In general, regular soap is fine. The combination of scrubbing your hands with soap — antibacterial or not — and rinsing them with water loosens and removes bacteria from your hands.

Proper hand washing with soap and water

Wet your hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clean bar soap. Lather well.

Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 to 20 seconds. (Sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice)

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.

Use a towel to turn off the faucet. If you are using a paper towel, also use it to open the bathroom door as you walk out.

Proper use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer

Apply about 1/2 teaspoon of the product to the palm of your hand.

Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.

If your hands are visibly dirty, however, wash with soap and water, if available, rather than a sanitizer.