

Correct Hand Washing Procedures

Washing your hands correctly or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, is the most effective action you can do to protect yourself against a number of infectious diseases, such as the "flu", the common cold, and COVID-19. Not only will it help keep you healthy, but it will also help prevent the spread of infectious diseases to others.

Background

Even if your hands appear to be clean, they carry germs. Hands pick up micro-organisms (germs) in a number of ways:

- When people who are sick sneeze or cough, the germs that are making them sick are expelled into the air in tiny droplets. If these droplets get onto your hands and then you touch your mouth, eyes or nose without washing away these germs, you can get sick.
- You can also get sick if you don't wash your hands before and after preparing food and after using the toilet.
- Washing your hands not only prevents you from getting sick, but it also reduces the risk of infecting others.
- Other people can also get sick from the germs unwashed hands leave on objects and surfaces such as doorknobs, keyboards, and other equipment in the home or workplace.
- The CDC's guidance for washing hands is not new. Until the COVID-19 crisis, most people have not paid attention to this guidance.

Hand Hygiene Guidance

All personnel should use an alcohol-based hand rub or wash with soap and water:

- Immediately before touching a client and administering care.
- Before moving from work on a soiled body site to a clean body site on the same client.
- After touching a client or the client's immediate environment.
- After contact with blood, body fluids, or contaminated surfaces.

- Before putting on gloves and immediately after glove removal.
- Before and afternoon handling food.

Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), remove jewelry, and apply soap.

- Hands could become recontaminated if a basin of standing water is used that has been contaminated through previous use.
- The temperature of the water does not appear to affect microbe removal. However, warmer water may cause more skin irritation for some people.
- Remove any hand or arm jewelry you are wearing under running water as they may harbor germs.
- Using soap to wash hands is more effective than using water alone because the surfactants in soap lift soil and microbes from the skin.

Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, in between your fingers, and also under your nails.

- Lathering and scrubbing hands creates friction, which helps lift dirt, grease and microbes from skin.
- Microbes are present on all surfaces of the hands and are in particularly high concentrations under the nails. Therefore the entire hand needs to be scrubbed.

Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Use a timer or sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice from beginning to end.

- Evidence suggests that washing hands for 15 to 30 seconds removes more germs from the hands than washing for shorter periods of time.
- You are scrubbing the dirt and germs off your hands. The soap does not kill these germs.
- 20 seconds of scrubbing your hands at a sink is much longer than you think. In fact, 20 seconds is about 3 to 4 times longer than most people think it is. Some people sing the entire "Happy Birthday" song twice to time how long they are washing their hands.
- After thoroughly washing your hands wash any jewelry you removed.

Rinse your hands well under clean running water to wash away the germs and then wash your jewelry.

- The purpose of scrubbing with soap is to lift dirt, grease, and microbes, including the disease-causing germs, from your skin so they can then be rinsed off of hands with the running water.
- Rinse off any hand jewelry you have removed, replace the jewelry and dry your hands with a clean towel.