



# 5 Steps to Hand-Washing (And 10 Best Times for It)

You know that washing your hands is the best way to keep from spreading germs. Now learn how and when!

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The simple act of hand-washing can help stop the spread of germs that can cause a cold or the flu. While we now take for granted the importance of hand-washing to prevent colds, the importance of hand-washing was discovered only 150 years ago.

"Hand-washing is still the best way to prevent colds and other respiratory and infectious diseases that are transmitted by hand to mouth or hand to nose/eye contact," says Samuel N. Grief, MD, medical director of campus care at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "Soap acts as a vehicle to trap the germs (i.e. viruses, bacteria) that are loosened by the act of rubbing your hands together under water. These germs can then be rinsed away by the water."

Contact with other people throughout the day, touching contaminated surfaces, and even petting animals can cause a variety of cold-causing germs to accumulate on your hands. Then by touching your eyes, nose, and mouth you can infect yourself if you don't wash your hands often enough. Touching someone else or touching a doorknob or other surface can then spread cold germs to others.

## The Best Way to Wash Your Hands

Hand-washing to prevent colds includes using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, a cleanser you can use without water. "There is no one best water temperature to wash one's hands," says Dr. Grief. "If your hands are really dirty and greasy, use of warm to hot

water will do a better job of trapping dirt and grease within the soap, allowing for a more thorough cleaning."

The type of soap also does not typically matter, according to Grief, "as long as it lathers and spreads over the hands sufficiently to trap the germs."

## 10 Times to Wash Hands

To prevent colds from spreading to others, practice regular hand-washing. Most importantly, wash hands:

- Before and after preparing or handling food, especially when handling uncooked poultry and meat
- Before eating
- After changing diapers
- After using the bathroom
- After sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose
- Before and after inserting contact lenses
- After touching an animal or animal waste
- After handling garbage
- Before and after treating wounds
- Before and after touching a sick or injured person

## 5 Steps to Proper Hand-Washing

If using soap and water for hand-washing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following five steps to prevent the spread of colds:

- Wet your hands with clean water — warm, if available — and apply soap.
- Lather by rubbing hands together; be sure to cover all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands together for 15 to 20 seconds — sing "Happy Birthday" twice in

your head.

- Thoroughly rinse hands under running water to ensure removal of residual germs.
- Use paper towels or an air dryer to dry hands and then, if possible, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers make a good substitute for hand-washing when soap and water is not available. A recent study from the University of Chicago showed that while soap-and-water hand-washing was most effective in removing influenza virus from the hands, using alcohol-based hand sanitizer was a close second. If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, apply product to one palm, rub your two hands together, making sure to reach all surfaces, and continue rubbing until hands are dry.

Preventing a week or two of misery from the common cold or flu will be well worth those 20 seconds spent with soap and water.



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