

When and How to Wash Hands*

Resource: Fact Sheet

Topic Area: Health and Safety

Subtopic Area: Food Safety

Introduction

Each year, people get sick and even die from preventable illnesses linked to poor handwashing practices. Skipping handwashing or improper handwashing increases the risk for common colds, meningitis, diarrheal illness, foodborne illnesses, and many other diseases and conditions. Therefore, it is important to follow good handwashing practices.

Application

Wash hands before the following activities:

- Beginning to work, both at the beginning of the shift and after breaks
- Preparing food
- Preparing, handling, or feeding bottles of infant formula or breast milk to an infant
- Setting the table or sitting down to eat
- Moving from one food preparation area to another
- Departing from classroom
- Putting on or changing disposable gloves

Wash hands after the following activities when hands appear or feel dirty:

- Handling raw food, meat, poultry, or fish
- Eating, drinking, or smoking
- Diapering a child or cleaning up a child who has used the bathroom
- Changing a bandage or giving first aid
- Using the toilet
- Sneezing, using a tissue, or helping a child to do so
- Coughing or covering your mouth with your hand
- Touching garbage
- Touching, feeding, or caring for pets or other animals
- Coming into contact with bodily fluids
- Entering and departing a classroom

How to Wash Hands

- Wet hands and forearms with clean, running water and apply soap.
- Scrub lathered hands and forearms, under fingernails, and between fingers for at least 20 seconds. Rinse thoroughly under warm, running water.
- Dry hands and forearms thoroughly with single-use paper towels or a warm hand dryer.
- Turn off water using paper towels.
- Use a paper towel to open the door when exiting the restroom.

Tips for Success

- Wash hands at the bathroom sink or a sink designated only for handwashing.
- Do not use the kitchen sink for handwashing.
- Keep liquid soap and paper towels near the handwashing sink.
- Have a step stool for children to reach the sink, if necessary.
- Clean and sanitize the handwashing sink daily.
- Post a copy of the “Wash Your Hands” mini-poster near the sink.

*Always follow your State or local regulatory agency requirements.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). *When & how to wash your hands*. www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *Water, sanitation & environmentally-related hygiene*. www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/fast_facts.html

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2013). *Handwashing*. www.theicn.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20130806030436.pdf

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