

Hand Hygiene: Help Prevent the Spread of Germs and Infections in the Clinic

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infections. This includes the common cold, flu, and even hard-to-treat infections such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

You can take action by asking your health care providers to wash their hands.

When to Practice Hand Hygiene

You should practice hand hygiene:

- before preparing or eating food
- before touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- before and after changing wound dressings or bandages
- after using the restroom or after changing diapers
- after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- after touching clinic surfaces such as an exam table, desk, doorknob or chair.

How to Practice Hand Hygiene

There are 2 different ways to clean your hands.

Soap and water

Use soap and water:

- if you have diarrhea or a stomach virus
- when your hands look dirty
- after you use the bathroom
- before you prepare and eat food.



It only takes 15 seconds of using either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub to remove the germs that cause infections.

To wash your hands:

- Wet your hands with warm water and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together until the soap forms a lather and then rub all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under your fingernails.
- Continue rubbing your hands for 15 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel. Then use your paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door, if needed.

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Alcohol-based hand rub

Use an alcohol-based hand rub:

- when your hands do not look dirty
- if soap and water are not available.

To clean your hands:

- Follow directions on the bottle for how much of the product to use.
- Rub hands together and then rub product all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under your fingernails.
- Continue rubbing for 15 seconds until your hands are dry.
- Rinse your hands with water and dry them with a towel.

Your Health Care Team

Your health care providers should practice hand hygiene:

- before and after touching you
- before putting on gloves
- after removing gloves
- before and after touching lines, drains and devices.



You and your health care providers should practice hand hygiene.

You Can Make a Difference in Your Own Health

Health care providers know they should practice hand hygiene, but they sometimes get distracted. Your friendly reminders are welcome.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.