

Germ Warfare: The Importance of Handwashing

For most of us, staying well isn't complicated. Simple lifestyle choices can go a long way toward our better health... and one of the simplest, yet most important, things we can do is wash our hands frequently. And that goes double during the winter months, when the flu is in season.

The importance of handwashing can be summed up in one word: Germs. Human and animal feces are prime sources of the germs that carry *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and norovirus, which cause diarrhea and can cause respiratory infections. And once the germs are on your hands, you not only risk getting yourself sick, you risk spreading the germs to others.

Hopefully you know that washing your hands after using the bathroom is a must-do, but it's hardly the only time a good cleaning is in order. Wash before, during, and after preparing food, as well as before you eat. If you blow your nose, cough or sneeze... wash. Just took out the trash? Wash. Petted a puppy or kitten? Wash. Bottom line, if there's a risk of getting or spreading germs, then wash those hands pronto!

Soap and running water are the most effective tools for handwashing. Bar soap is okay, but can itself become contaminated, especially if used by multiple people – so liquid soap is a better alternative. Or if you're going somewhere that soap and water won't be readily available, bring along an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



This Is the Way We Wash Our Hands...

Effective handwashing is an art... and soap and water is just the start.

- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the faucet, and apply soap.
- **Lather** your hands thoroughly by rubbing them together with the soap.
- **Scrub** your hands and nails for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- **Turn off** the faucet again, this time with a paper towel.
- **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.
- **Protect** your hands from touching dirty surfaces as you leave the bathroom.

SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control, Cleveland Clinic, Active Beat