

Coronavirus protect yourself: Handwashing can help prevent spread of Covid-19

The World Health Organization has launched #SafeHands challenge to promote the importance of handwashing to fight against the spread.

During a global pandemic, one of the cheapest, easiest, and most important ways to prevent the spread of a virus is to wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

Why hand washing is important?

Respiratory viruses like coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spread when mucus or droplets containing the virus get into your body through your eyes, nose or throat. Most often, this happens through your hands. Hands are also one of the most common ways that the virus spreads from one person to the next.

How do I wash my hands properly?

To eliminate all traces of the virus on your hands, a quick scrub and a rinse won't cut it. Below is a step-by-step process for effective handwashing.

Step 1: Wet hands with running water

Step 2: Apply enough soap to cover wet hands

Step 3: Scrub all surfaces of the hands – including the back of hands, between fingers and under nails – for at least 20 seconds.

Step 4: Rinse thoroughly with running water

Step 5: Dry hands with a clean cloth or single-use towel

How long should I wash my hands for?

You should wash your hands for at least 20-30 seconds. An easy way to time it is by singing the full happy birthday song, twice!

The same goes for hand sanitizer: use a sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and rub it into your hands for at least 20 seconds to ensure full coverage.

When should I wash my hands?

In the context of COVID-19 prevention, you should make sure to wash your hands at the following times:

- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After visiting a public space, including public transportation, supermarkets and places of worship
- After touching surfaces outside of the home, including money
- Before, during and after caring for a sick person
- Before and after eating

In general, you should always wash your hands at the following times:

- After using the toilet
- Before and after eating
- After handling garbage
- After touching animals and pets
- After helping children use the toilet
- When your hands are visibly dirty

How can I help my child wash his/her hands?

You can help children wash their hands by making handwashing easier for them, for instance, by setting up a stool so they can reach water and soap by themselves.

You can make it fun for them by singing their favorite songs while you help them rub their hands!

Do I need to use warm water to wash my hands?

No, you can use any temperature of water to wash your hands. Cold water and warm water are equally effective at killing germs and viruses – as long as you use soap!

Do I need to dry my hands with a towel?

Germs spread more easily from wet skin than from dry skin, so drying your hands completely is an important step. Paper towels or clean clothes are the most effective way to remove germs without spreading them to other surfaces.

Which is better: washing your hands or using hand sanitizer?

In general, both handwashing with soap and water and hand sanitizer, when practiced/used correctly, are highly effective at killing most germs and pathogens. Hand sanitizer is often more convenient when you are outside of the home, but can be expensive or difficult to find in emergency contexts like this. Also, alcohol-based hand sanitizer kills the coronavirus, but it does not kill all kinds of bacteria and viruses. For example, it is relatively ineffective against other kinds of viruses.

Washing your hands can protect you and your loved ones!

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