

NBSIA Member Services Safety Bulletin

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HOW TO PROPERLY WASH HANDS—AND WHY

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Below is the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommended method of hand washing and the science behind it.

When to Wash Your Hands

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- After touching an animal, animal feed or waste
- After touching garbage

How to Wash Your Hands Effectively

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.

- Hands could become contaminated if placed in standing water that has been previously used.
- Surprisingly, water temperature does *not* affect microbe removal.
- Turning off the faucet saves water.
- Soap lifts soil and microbes from skin, and people tend to scrub hands better when using it.
- Studies have shown that there are no added health benefits of antibacterial soaps versus plain soap (excluding healthcare professionals).

2. Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.

- Lathering and scrubbing hands creates friction, which helps lift dirt, grease, and microbes from skin.

- Microbes are present on all surfaces of the hand, in particularly high concentration under the nails.



3. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum “Happy Birthday” at least once through.

- Evidence shows that washing hands for at least 15-30 seconds removes more germs from hands than washing for shorter periods.

4. Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.

- Rinsing hands with clean, running water is imperative to fully remove germs and dirt.

5. Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

- Germs can be transferred more easily to and from wet hands; therefore, hands should be dried after washing. Studies suggest that using a clean towel or air drying hands are best.

Sources

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/handwashing/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-handwashing.html>



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