

Why Do I Need to Wash My Hands?

"Did you wash your hands?"

How many times did you hear that today? Probably a lot. But why are adults so hung up on hand washing? Why are they so in love with lather?

Washing your hands is the best way to stop germs from spreading. Think about all of the things that you touched today — from the telephone to the toilet. Maybe you blew your nose in a tissue and then went outside to dig around the dirt.

Quick Poll

Be honest: Do you always wash your hands after using the bathroom?

Yes

No

Vote

[View Results](#)

Quick Poll

Be honest: Do you always wash your hands after using the bathroom?

Yes

No

Vote

[View Results](#)

Whatever you did today, you came into contact with germs. It's easy for a germ on your hand to end up in your mouth. Think about how many foods you eat with your hands.

You can't wear rubber gloves all day long, but you can wash your hands so those germs don't get a chance to make you or someone else sick.

So when are the best times to wash your hands?

- when your hands are dirty

- before eating or touching food (like if you're helping cook or bake, for example)
- after using the bathroom
- after blowing your nose or coughing
- after touching pets or other animals
- after playing outside
- before and after visiting a sick relative or friend

Now you have the **when** and the **why** of hand washing. But did you know that a lot of people don't know **how** to get their paws perfectly clean?

The next time you're told to step up to the sink and scrub up, remember these handy hints:

1. Use warm water (not cold or hot) when you wash your hands.
2. Use whatever soap you like. Some soaps come in cool shapes and colors or smell nice, but whatever kind gets you scrubbing is the kind you should use. Antibacterial soaps are OK to use, but regular soap works fine.
3. Work up some lather on both sides of your hands, your wrists, and between your fingers. Don't forget to wash around your nails. This is one place germs like to hide. Wash for about 10 to 15 seconds — about how long it takes to sing "Happy Birthday." (Sing it quickly two times or just once if you go nice and slow.)
4. Rinse and dry well with a clean towel.

Reviewed by: Rupal Christine Gupta, MD

Date reviewed: August 2014

Note: All information on KidsHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995-2017 Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.

Images provided by The Nemours Foundation, iStock, Getty Images, Corbis, Veer, Science Photo Library, Science Source Images, Shutterstock, and Clipart.com

