



Hand hygiene

- Hand hygiene means cleaning your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub (hand sanitiser).
- Proper hand hygiene reduces the spread of germs.

Why is it important?

Good hand hygiene is the most effective way to stop infections spreading.

Many infections are caused by spreading germs from person-to-person.

Even when your hands look clean they can still be carrying germs. This is because they are so small that you just can't see them. This is why when we touch other people or objects we can spread germs without even realising it.



When to wash your hands

You should wash your hands properly and often, especially:

- after you cough, sneeze or blow your nose
- before, during and after preparing food
- after going to the toilet or changing a nappy
- when your hands are visibly dirty
- after smoking
- after handling or patting animals
- before and after taking care of someone who is sick
- when you enter and leave a healthcare facility.



How to wash your hands

Most of us don't pay attention to how we wash our hands, but it's important to do it the right way.

Use soap and water

When your hands are visibly dirty, wash them with soap and water.

- Wet your hands and apply the soap.
- Rub the soap all over your hands. Pay attention to the backs of your hands and fingers, fingernails, fingertips, and the webbing between fingers.





- Rinse your hand under running water
- Pat hands dry with a towel or paper towel



- Use enough product to cover both of hands.
- Rub all surfaces of your hands. Pay attention to the backs of your hands and fingers, fingernails, fingertips, and the webbing between fingers.
- Rub hands together until dry.



Alcohol-based hand rubs come in small containers which can be carried in your bag or briefcase, or in your pocket. They are ideal for travelling.

Hand hygiene in healthcare settings

When we are fit and healthy we can usually defend ourselves against germs and infections. Having healthy and intact (unbroken) skin is one of the ways we can do this.

When you are not well, such as after an operation, your ability to fight infection can be weakened. Having an infection in hospital can result in:

- illness
- longer stay in hospital
- slower recovery
- additional stress for all concerned.

Each time you visit someone in a healthcare facility it is very important that you clean your hands, even if they look clean. Bottles of hand rub should be located in all patient care areas and in high traffic areas in your healthcare facility.

Working together

Research has shown that improving hand hygiene:

- among healthcare workers can reduce the spread of germs in hospital settings
- protects both patients and healthcare workers
- reduces the number of healthcare associated infections.

