

Your good health is very important to us, both while you're at the hospital and when you are back at home. Learn how to prevent infection, and make sure everyone in your household, including children, learns and follows good hygiene practices.

Wash your hands.

Our bodies are full of microbes (germs), most of which are beneficial and help keep us healthy. We also pick up germs from contact with other persons or objects. Some of these germs are harmful and can cause illness. Unfortunately, they are easy to pass along from person to person, or object to person, enabling infection or illness to spread.

Although some germs can spread through the air, the most common way that germs spread is through hand contact. For this reason, the best way to stop the spread of germs is to wash or sanitize your hands.

It is important to use soap every time you wash your hands. Washing hands with water alone is not enough! Soap is necessary to dissolve and rinse away the grease and dirt that harbor germs.

The most important times to wash your hands with soap and water are after using the toilet or cleaning a child and before handling food.

Wash your hands:

- Whenever they look dirty
- Before you eat
- Before and after preparing food
- After using the toilet
- After any contact with bodily fluids, such as saliva, blood or urine
- After touching pets or animals
- After touching objects in public places, especially knobs, handles and buttons

Be sure to wash your hands the right way:

- If using a cloth towel to dry hands, have it nearby before you start to wash.
- Wet hands with water.
- Apply soap to hands. Lotion soap is best—germs can live on bar soap. However, if you do use bar soap, store it on a rack that allows it to dry between uses.
- Rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds, making sure to cover all surfaces of hands, fingers and thumbs.
- Rinse hands well to remove soap residue.
- Dry hands gently and thoroughly using soft paper towels. If using cloth towels, remember that damp towels may harbor germs. Allow them to dry out after use, and replace them often.
- Use towel to turn off faucet.

Use disinfecting hand sanitizers.

Sanitize your hands by using gels or foams containing alcohol, which kills germs so that they can no longer cause infection.

Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers:

- For routine cleaning of hands anytime they are not visibly dirty
- If you have contact with contaminated objects in the environment
- Before and after you care for or have contact with someone who is very sick, very old or very young
- After touching another person's skin, especially when the other person has a cold or other illness
- When you travel or when soap and water are not readily available
- Whenever you want to clean your hands

When using hand-sanitizing products, keep the following in mind:

- Choose hand sanitizers containing alcohol, listed as isopropyl, ethanol or n-propanol as ingredients.
- Choose alcohol hand sanitizers with glycerol or other emollients to restore moisture to the skin.
- It is not necessary, or recommended, to routinely wash hands after application of alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Do not wipe off alcohol hand sanitizers. Let hands air dry.
- Use of antimicrobial hand wipes is considered equivalent to handwashing, but they are not as effective in killing germs as using alcohol hand sanitizers.

When used on dry or chafed skin, alcohol may cause a temporary stinging effect, but if products are chosen carefully, the chance of this is decreased.

While alcohol-containing preparations reduce germs on your hands, they cannot remove visible soil or contamination. It is always important to wash your hands with soap and water any time they look dirty.

Take care of your skin.

Healthy, well-moisturized skin is less prone to cracking, abrasion, and tearing. Make good skin care, especially for your hands, a routine habit.

Sometimes, in spite of even the best preventive efforts, you may have symptoms of dry skin, including flaking, redness, itching, burning, or cracking. Treat dry skin early to prevent it from getting worse.

- Add moisture to skin by soaking in warm water, then applying lotions that contain ingredients such as glycerin that attract and hold moisture in the skin.
- Wear light cotton gloves for several hours or overnight after the above steps.
- Thoroughly dry your hands after washing, preferably with an air dryer if available.