



Hand Washing

Why it's important

A number of infectious diseases can be spread from one person to another by contaminated hands, particularly gastrointestinal infections and hepatitis A. Washing your hands properly can help prevent the spread of the organisms that cause these diseases.

Some forms of gastroenteritis can cause serious complications, especially for young children, the elderly or those with a weakened immune system. Drying your hands properly is as important as washing them.

When to wash your hands

You should wash your hands thoroughly:

- Before preparing food
- Before eating
- Between handling raw and cooked or ready-to-eat food
- After going to the toilet
- After smoking
- After using a tissue or handkerchief
- After handling rubbish

How to wash your hands properly

To wash hands properly:

- Wet your hands with warm water.
- Apply one dose of liquid soap and lather well for 15–20 seconds (or longer if the dirt is ingrained).
- Rub hands together rapidly across all surfaces of your hands and wrists to help remove dirt and germs.
- Don't forget the backs of your hands, your wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Wash your hands for at least 10 to 15 seconds.
- Rinse well under running water and make sure all traces of soap are removed, as residues may cause irritation.

- Pat your hands dry using paper towels. Make sure your hands are thoroughly dry.
- Dry under any rings you wear, as they can be a source of future contamination if they remain moist. If possible, remove rings and watches before you wash your hands.
- Hot air driers can be used but, again, you should ensure your hands are thoroughly dry.



Use warm water

Hands should be washed using warm running water.

Cold water is better than no water at all for a 'one off' only hand wash, but should not be used for routine hand washing. Soap lathers ('soaps up') better with warm water and effective hand washing requires the use of warm water, soap and proper drying.

Soap is important

Soap contains ingredients that will help to:

- Loosen dirt on your hands
- Soften water, making it easier to lather the soap over your hands
- Rinse your hands, leaving no residues to irritate and dry your skin.

Soaps can have different pH – they may be neutral, slightly alkaline or slightly acidic. That's why some soaps irritate some people and not others. Perfumes in soap can be another reason why some people have skin reactions.



Liquid soap is best

Generally, it is better to use liquid soap than bar soap, particularly at work. The benefits of liquid soap include:

- Hygiene – it is less likely to be contaminated.
- Right amount – liquid soap dispensers do not dispense more than required (more is not better).
- Less waste – it's easier to use, with less wastage. 'Drop-in' cassette dispensers use all the soap.
- Saves time – liquid soap dispensers are easy and efficient to use.

The problems with bar soap – particularly in public places

There are many reasons why bar soap can be a problem, particularly if it's used by a lot of people.

These problems include:

- Bar soap can sit in pools of water and become contaminated with many harmful germs.
- People are less likely to use bar soap if it is 'messy' from sitting in water.
- Contaminated soap may spread germs and may be more harmful than not washing your hands.
- Bar soap can dry out – people are less likely to use it to wash their hands because it is difficult to lather.
- Dried out bar soap will develop cracks which can harbour dirt and germs. Again, you may be adding more harmful germs to your hands than you were trying to remove.

Things to remember

- Proper hand washing can protect you and others from a range of diseases.
- Liquid soap is better than bar soap, especially at work.
- Wash and dry your hands carefully.

HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS

1 Only wash hands in the hand basin provided



2 Use liquid soap and warm running water



3 Rub hands together to produce a good lather. Wash for at least 10-15 seconds



4 Remember thumbs, in between fingers, under nails and wrists



5 Rinse well under running water, and dry with disposable paper towel

