VALLEYHEALTH

Handwashing: Simple Steps to Stop the Spread

Handwashing is a simple habit that helps stop everyday germs and keeps you and your community healthy. Here's how to make it part of your routine.

Why Handwashing Matters

- We touch people, surfaces, and devices all day; many germs spread by contact.
- Effective handwashing removes the germs that cause illness—and keeps you from carrying them to others.

Soap and Water vs. Hand Sanitizer

- **Use soap and water** when hands are **visibly dirty or greasy.** Soap, water, and rubbing lift dirt, chemicals, and germs so they rinse away.
- **Use hand sanitizer** when hands look clean but you need quick protection. Choose a product with about **70% alcohol.**

How to Wash With Soap and Water (About 20 Seconds)

1. **Wet** hands with clean running water (warm or cold)
2. **Lather** with soap
3. **Scrub everywhere:** palms, **backs of hands, between fingers, under nails,** and thumbs
4. **Rinse** well under running water
5. **Dry** with a clean towel or hand dryer

Tip: Hum **"Happy Birthday"** twice or the **ABCs** to reach 20 seconds.

How to Use Hand Sanitizer

- Apply the **recommended amount** to one palm.
- **Rub all hand surfaces**—backs, between fingers, and under nails.
- **Keep rubbing until dry.** Do **not** wipe off early; it won't work as well.

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When to Clean Your Hands

- **Before:** eating, preparing food, caring for a baby, or treating a cut.
- **After:** using the bathroom, changing diapers, blowing your nose, coughing/sneezing, touching trash, or handling animals/pet waste.
- **Out and about:** after using shared screens, carts, or door handles.

Common Mistakes

- **Not long enough:** rushing the 20 seconds.
- **Missing spots:** backs of hands, between fingers, under nails, and thumbs.
- **Wiping off sanitizer** before it dries.
- **Skipping drying:** wet hands spread germs more easily.

Make It a Habit

- Keep soap at every sink and **alcohol-based sanitizer** in bags, cars, and classrooms.
- Set reminders for kids (and adults). Posters near sinks help everyone remember.
- During cold and flu season, clean high-touch surfaces and wash hands more often.

Clean hands protect you, your family and your community. Small daily habits—like washing for 20 seconds and letting sanitizer dry—make a big difference.

For more tips or to connect with care, visit valleyhealth.org.