



Hand Sanitizers

Advice for using gels, foams and wipes

Hand sanitizers are designed as a personal care product to be used if soap and water are not available. They contain ingredients to help reduce the number of germs on the hand. They are not effective if hands have visible dirt on them. Frequent hand washing is the best way to avoid getting sick and spreading illness.



Tips for Keeping Your Hands Clean

- Washing your hands with soap and water is the best defense against germs.
 - ⇒ Wash hands for as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice, rinse and dry.
- Use hand sanitizers if soap & water are not available.
 - ⇒ Hand sanitizers:
 - * Must contain at least 60% alcohol to be most effective
 - * Will not work on dirty hands; dirt & natural oils create a barrier
 - * Should not contain any harsh ingredients such as bleach that could be a danger to your health
 - * Can reduce the number of germs on the hand but do not eliminate them all.
- Wipes or towelettes are another option. Look for products with at least 60% alcohol. Make sure they are designed for use on hands.

Recommendations for Effective Hand Washing



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) general policy on hand hygiene recommends the following methods to prevent transmission of bacteria and viruses:

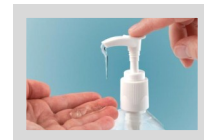
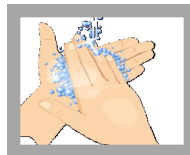
Most effective

1. Washing hands with soap and water at least 20 seconds or as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice.

2. Cleaning hands using an alcohol-based hand-rub sanitizer that contains greater than 60% alcohol (ethyl alcohol, ethanol, isopropanol, isopropyl). These products significantly reduce the number of germs on the skin and are fast acting. However, they are not effective if hands are visibly dirty. Germs, organic matter and natural oils on hands create a barrier that blocks the effectiveness of the sanitizer. There is a danger of small children ingesting alcohol-based hand sanitizers by mistake.

3. Cleaning hands using a non-alcohol based hand-rub gel sanitizer. Non-alcohol based hand sanitizers (foam) have as the active ingredient benzethonium chloride, a quaternary ammonia. These sanitizers have not been proven to be as effective as the alcohol-based sanitizers against viruses.

Not as effective



Wipes or towelettes are another option if soap and water are not available. Look for a product that contains a high percentage of alcohol (>60%). Make sure to use only wipes designed for hands and not disinfecting wipes which have stronger chemicals in them such as benzalkonium chloride, a quaternary ammonia. Again, if your hands are visibly dirty, they are not effective in reducing the number of germs on the skin.

How to use a hand sanitizer correctly:

1. Apply enough of the product to the palm of your hand to wet your hands completely.
2. Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces, until your hands are dry.

Limit the use of anti-microbials found in many liquid and bar soaps. Overuse of these may lead to the development of resistant bacteria. They are no more effective in removing germs than soap and water. Also avoid liquid hand soaps with the active ingredient triclosan. This chemical has raised health concerns. Read labels for the active ingredients. Note that some manufacturers may make misleading claims.

Where Can I Get More Information?

- [Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives](#) (CDC)
- [Hand Washing Do's and Don'ts](#) (Mayo Clinic)



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