Clean Your Hands

This information from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is for veterans, their families, friends, visitors, volunteers, and employees. It describes when and how to clean hands with soap and water or, with alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

## What You Use to Clean Your Hands

Alcohol hand sanitizers

- are alcohol-based liquid, gel, rub, or foam hand cleaners
- don't require water to clean hands
- kill most germs that cause disease and illness (like colds or flu)
- are not effective on germs that live in your intestines

Not all hand sanitizers contain alcohol: Check the label. Use only alcohol-based sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol.

Use soap & water instead of alcohol hand sanitizer

- when hands are visibly dirty or soiled
- before eating or preparing food, after handling raw meat, after handling animal waste, and after using the restroom, changing diapers, or assisting someone with toileting
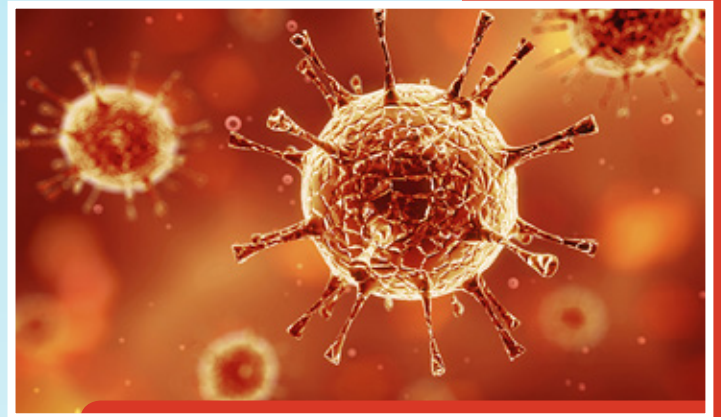
How to Clean Your Hands

Using soap and water

1. Wet hands using warm water
2. Add soap to make lather
3. Rub palms, back of hands, and between fingers
4. Rub for at least 15 seconds
5. Rinse hands and dry well

Using alcohol-based hand sanitizers

1. Apply to the palm of one hand (to use on BOTH hands)
2. Rub palms, back of hands, and between fingers
3. Rub until hands are dry (if it does not take at least 30 seconds, you may need to add more alcohol hand sanitizer)

Cleaning hands properly is easy and quick!

When to Clean Your Hands

Clean hands before

- eating or preparing food (use soap and water)
- caring for someone who is sick
- treating a cut or wound
- visiting a patient's room

Clean hands after

- going to the bathroom (use soap and water)
- handling raw meat (use soap and water)
- handling animal waste (use soap and water)
- changing diapers or assisting someone with toileting (use soap and water)
- caring for someone sick
- blowing your nose
- coughing or sneezing
- touching garbage
- touching an animal
- treating a cut or wound
- leaving a patient's room

Together we can stop the spread of germs.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

www.cdc.gov/handwashing
www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html
www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits

NOTE: This information is NOT intended to address specific hand decontamination requirements for health professionals caring for patients.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VHA National Center of Health
Promotion and Disease Prevention

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Infection
Don't Pass It On

www.prevention.va.gov/flu

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
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