Handwashing Steps to Prevent Infections

Use these handwashing steps to help keep germs out of your department and cut down on sick days.

Most people understand the health and hygienic importance of washing your hands. Handwashing is especially important in working environments to help prevent infections from spreading. Employees who don't take the time to follow careful (and frequent) handwashing procedures to remove germs can get sick themselves and spread them to others by:

- Touching their eyes, nose or mouth
- Preparing food or drink
- Grabbing handrails, doorknobs or touching tables and other objects

Calling handwashing "one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that by keeping your hands clean you can help prevent passing diseases to others.

Use these step-by-step handwashing instructions to help keep germs out of your department and cut down on sick days. **According to the World Health Organization, the entire handwashing process should take about 40 to 60 seconds.**

Wet Your Hands First

You can use either cold or warm running water. A sink filled with standing water could be contaminated from a previous use.

Step 1: Use Soap

Don't scrimp on it; apply enough of it to cover all surfaces of your hands.

Step 2: Rub Palms Together

Create a lather by rubbing your palms together.

Step 3: Put Your Right Palm Over The Back Of Your Left Hand

Interlace your fingers and rub your hands back forth to get the soap on the back of your hand and in between fingers, then repeat with your left palm over your right hand.

Step 4: Rub Palms Together With Interlaced Fingers

Rub palms back and forth, getting the soap between your fingers.

Step 5: Place Backs of Finger In The Opposing Palm

Rotate your hands together.

Step 6: Grip Left Thumb With Right Hand

Rotate right hand to scrub your left thumb, then repeat with your left hand grabbing your right thumb.

Step 7: Scrub Left Palm With Fingertips of Right Hand

Rotate clasped fingertips in the palm of your left hand, then repeat with clasped fingertips on your left hand in the palm of your right hand.

Step 8: Rinse Your Hands

Make sure to remove all soap from the backs of your hands, palms and between your fingers.

Step 9: Dry Hands

Dry your hands thoroughly with a single-use paper towel.

Step 10: Turn Off the Faucet

Use the paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Step 11: You Are Done

Your hands are now clean.

When to Wash Your Hands

Frequent hand-washing is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading illness. The CDC advises washing hands when they are visibly dirty, or:

Before:

- Preparing or eating food
- Treating wounds or caring for a sick person
- Inserting or removing contact lenses

After:

- Preparing or eating food
- Using the toilet or changing a diaper
- Touching an animal, animal feed or waste
- Blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- Treating wounds or caring for a sick person
- Handling garbage

If soap and water aren't available, you can use hand sanitizers instead. It should be an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol. Apply the product to one palm and rub your hands together. Continue to rub your hands and fingers until all surfaces are covered and your hands are dry.

How Do I Use Alcohol-Based Hand Rubs?

Alcohol-based hand rubs should only be used if no visible dirt is present on the hands.

- Remove hand and arm jewellery.
- Apply enough alcohol-based hand rub to make about the size of a quarter onto your hands, enough when you rub your hands together to cover all areas of your hands, including under your nails (1-2 pumps).
- Use a rubbing motion to evenly distribute the alcohol-based hand rub over all surfaces of the hands, particularly between fingers, fingertips, back of hands and base of thumbs.
- Rub hands until your hands feel dry (minimum 15-30 seconds).

Hitting Germs Right Where It Hurts

If your employees aren't washing their hands correctly or frequently enough, it's time to remind them of the importance of doing so - namely because it helps keep germs out of your department and can cut down on sick days.

Hang signs in strategic areas (in restrooms, near sinks, etc.) reminding employees to wash their hands. Get supervisors onboard with reminding their team members of the importance of good handwashing, and invest in hand soap, single-use towels, hand sanitizer, and air hand dryers that make it easy for your employees to comply.