

# Q.

What's the right way to wash your hands?

# A.

Know what you should do if you want to avoid the common cold, flu virus, or germs that can make you sick? Wash your hands.

Makes sense, right? It takes less than a minute to wash your hands. It's a lot less expensive than going to the doctor or hospital to get treated for a virus or the flu. And it's easy.

Maybe you give your hands a quick rinse. But you likely need to do better at washing your hands ... a lot better.

A recent study found that only about five percent of people wash their hands long enough with the right technique to make a clean getaway.<sup>1</sup>

And that's kind of gross. If you don't wash your hands properly, you're basically making a statement that you don't mind:

- Diarrhea
- Respiratory infections
- Skin irritations
- Eye infections
- A weakened immune system
- Digestive problems
- Vomiting

It's just too easy to transfer germs that can make you sick from dirty hands to your eyes, mouth, or nose. But it doesn't have to be that way.



Just 20 seconds of proper hand-washing can remove up to 92 percent of germs that can make you sick.<sup>2</sup>

Here's how it's done in five simple steps:<sup>3</sup>

1. **Wet your hands** with clean water—warm or cold.
2. **Lather up with soap**—anti-bacterial or regular. Rub your hands together to cover your palms, between your fingers, under your nails, and the backs of your hands with soap.
3. **Scrub your hands** for at least 20 seconds. That's about how long it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
4. **Rinse your hands off** with clean water.
5. **Dry your hands** with a clean towel, paper towels, dryer, or just let them air dry.

## ASK THE *Wellness* DOCTOR

If you want to stay healthy, make it a habit to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds:

- ✓ Before, during, and after preparing food
- ✓ Before and after taking care of someone who is sick
- ✓ Before and after treating a cut or wound
- ✓ After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing into your hand
- ✓ After shaking hands with others or touching surfaces like hand rails, door knobs, vending or ATM machine buttons, and gas pump handles
- ✓ After using the restroom
- ✓ After changing diapers
- ✓ After touching an animal, animal feed, or waste
- ✓ After touching garbage

There's at least one more time you should wash your hands. Any time your hands feel dirty, especially during cold and flu season. Take 20 seconds to protect your health, and wash your hands.

### References

1. Borchgrevink, C., et al. (2013). Hand washing practices in a college town environment. *Journal of Environmental Health*, 75(8): 18-24. From: <https://tinyurl.com/y8tqq3h2>
2. Burton, M., et al. (2011). The effect of handwashing with water or soap on bacterial contamination of hands. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 8(1): 97-104. From: <https://tinyurl.com/y93oqaw3>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). Wash your hands. From: <https://tinyurl.com/ycn9hsca>

