

What you need to know about handwashing.

Why should I use soap and water to wash my hands? Germs can get onto your hands and items you touch throughout the day. When your hands may be dirty, it's best to wash with soap and water to remove whatever germs and chemicals may be on them. Warm or cold water? Either is fine, as long as it's clean. Bar soap or liquid? Either is fine. Does the soap have to be antibacterial to work? No. Plain soap and water works just as well. What if I don't have soap, but I have access to water? Using soap to wash hands is more effective than using water alone, but if water is all you have, rub your hands together under it and dry with a clean towel or air dry. When hands are not visibly dirty you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. How long do I need to scrub when washing my hands? Scrubbing your hands for at least 20-30 seconds is most effective. Do I have to clean under my fingernails? Yes, germs like to hide under fingernails. Make sure to clean there, too. Towel or air dry? Either is fine, but if you're using a towel make sure it's clean. Should I use a paper towel to turn off the faucet or open the door of a public bathroom? There isn't much scientific evidence about this. If you are concerned about getting germs on your hands after you wash them, you can use a paper towel to turn off a faucet or open door handles. What if I don't have soap or water to wash my hands? If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly kill most types of germs on the hands but may not kill certain bacteria and viruses that cause diarrhea. You should wash your hands before eating or after using the restroom. Protect yourself and others by washing your hands with soap and water. Learn more about the magic of hand washing. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/handwashing