

# HANDWASHING BASICS

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that handwashing is the most important thing you can do to keep from getting sick.*

Soap combined with the scrubbing action helps dislodge and remove germs. It is not necessary to use a special antimicrobial soap - regular bar or liquid soap is sufficient, even for general healthcare workers. In addition, there is concern that antimicrobial soap may eventually contribute to the growing problem of antibiotic resistance. It's always best to wash your hands with soap and water, but when water isn't available you can use alcohol-based products for washing your hands.



## When Should You Wash Your Hands?

- ✧ Before and after treating a cut, burn or wound
- ✧ When tending to someone who is sick
- ✧ After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- ✧ After going to the bathroom
- ✧ After changing a soiled/wet diaper or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom
- ✧ Before preparing or eating food
- ✧ After handling uncooked foods, particularly raw meat, poultry, eggs or fish
- ✧ After handling an animal (especially a reptile) or animal waste
- ✧ After handling garbage

## If You Are Washing Your Hands with Alcohol-Based Products

Alcohol-based gel sanitizers don't need water to work. Apply the product to the palm of one hand and rub your hands together for at least 15 seconds. Cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers (pay special attention to the areas most commonly missed, such as the fingertips, creases of the palms and outer edges of the hands until entire hands are dry. Alcohol-based products significantly reduce the number of microorganisms on skin, are fast acting and usually cause little skin irritation. While the alcohol does kill germs, alcohol-based products do not remove dirt. "Dirty hands" must still be washed with soap and water as soon as possible.



## If You Are Washing Your Hands with Soap and Water

- ① Place your hands together under water (warm water if possible).
- ② Add soap and rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds. Wash all surfaces thoroughly - wrists, palms, backs of hands, and fingers.
- ③ Make sure to clean any dirt or other material from under your fingernails.
- ④ Rinse the soap from your hands.
- ⑤ Dry your hands with a clean paper towel. If a clean towel isn't available, air dry your hands. Pat your skin rather than rubbing to avoid chapping and cracking.
- ⑥ Turn off the faucet using the paper towel to avoid re-contaminating your hands. Throw the towel in the trash.