



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Hand Hygiene and Preventing Infection

This information explains how to clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

## Why is hand hygiene so important?

When germs get into your body, they can cause infection. Everyone is at risk for infection while in the hospital. Hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of germs and infections. It only takes 20 seconds of washing your hands or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (such as Purell®) to kill germs. Take action by cleaning your hands and asking your visitors to clean their hands.

## When should I clean my hands with soap and water?

Clean your hands:

- After using the toilet, urinal, or bedside commode.
- If your hands look dirty.
- Before you eat or prepare food.
- If you have an infection with the germ *Clostridium difficile* (*C. diff*) or norovirus.
- After vomiting (throwing up) or coughing up phlegm (mucus).

## What is the right way to clean my hands with soap and water?

1. Wet your hands with warm water. Use liquid soap, if you can. Use enough soap to cover both your hands.
2. Rub your hands together. Rub the soap over the top of your hands, between your fingers, and in the area around and under your fingernails.
3. Keep rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds.
4. Rinse your hands well under warm running water.

5. Dry your hands with a paper towel.
6. Use a dry paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the bathroom door, if needed.



Please visit [www.mskcc.org/videos/how-wash-your-hands-properly](http://www.mskcc.org/videos/how-wash-your-hands-properly) to watch this video.

## When should I clean my hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer?

Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- If you don't have soap and water.
- When you leave your hospital room and when you come back.
- Before eating.

If you cannot get out of bed, you can use an individually packaged hand wipe.

## What is the right way to clean my hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer?

1. Use enough sanitizer to cover both of your hands.
2. Rub your hands together. Rub the sanitizer over the top of your hands, between your fingers, and in the area around and under your fingernails.
3. Keep rubbing until your hands are dry. It should take at least 20 seconds of rubbing before your hands feel dry. Don't rinse your hands with water or dry them with a towel.

## Where can I get more information about hand hygiene?

If you have questions, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also visit the following website for more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[www.cdc.gov/hygiene/personal-hygiene/hands.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/personal-hygiene/hands.html)

# When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of the following:

- A fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher.
- A temperature of 96.8° F (36° C) or lower.
- New or worsening chills or sweating.
- New or worsening redness around a wound.
- New or increased drainage from a wound.
- New or worsening shortness of breath or trouble breathing.
- A heartbeat that is faster than usual.
- New or worsening cough.
- New or worsening pain.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

Hand Hygiene and Preventing Infection - Last updated on May 18, 2023

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## Last Updated

May 18, 2023

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Was this information easy to understand?

Yes

Somewhat

No

What could we have explained better?

Please do not write your name or any personal information.

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