The Power to Stop Infections is in Everyone's Hands

Hand Hygiene
Everyone has germs on their body. Some of these germs help keep us healthy, while some make us sick. When we have contact with people, animals, and objects, we pick up some germs and leave some germs. Sometimes we pick up germs that make us sick. Sometimes we leave germs that make others sick, even though these germs didn't make us sick.

Germs can be spread by coughing and sneezing, but they are spread by hand contact most of the time. The best way to stop the spread of germs is to clean our hands often. You can clean your hands by washing them with soap and water or using an alcohol hand rub. When you wash your hands with soap and water, the rubbing of your hands loosens many of the germs and the water rinses them away. When you use an alcohol hand rub, the alcohol kills many of the germs on your hands. Simple hand cleaning helps prevent the flu, common colds, and other infections.

The providers and staff of UW Health are dedicated to keeping you safe while you are here. They know they should wash their hands or use alcohol hand rub often while they provide care for you, but there may be times when they forget. If you do not see your caregivers clean their hands when entering your room, please ask them to do so. It only takes a few words like these to support this healthy habit:

- "Excuse me; did you clean your hands?"
- "I saw that you cleaned your hands, thank you!"

It is also important for family members and visitors to wash their hands when they visit you. They should clean their hands when they enter your room and leave your room.

Keep in mind that objects such as doorknobs, keyboards, elevator buttons, and phones may carry germs that can make us sick. Since it is hard to avoid these objects, it is vital to clean our hands often. If you must stay in bed, please ask your caregiver for soap and water or alcohol hand rub to clean your hands.

How to Wash Hands the Right Way

1. **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold). Turn off the tap, and apply soap.
2. **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
3. **Scrub** your hands **for at least 20 seconds**. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
4. **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
5. **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or an air dryer.

How to Use Alcohol Hand Rubs

1. Put the alcohol hand rub in the palm of one hand.
2. Rub your hands together. Clean all parts of your hands, fingers, thumbs, nails, and wrists.
3. Rub your hands until they are dry. It should take 25-30 seconds to dry your hands.

Alcohol Hand Rubs or Soap and Water
Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations. If soap and water are not readily available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if your hands are not visibly dirty or contaminated with blood, urine, stool or vomit. If hands are visibly dirty or contaminated, soap and water hand washing is needed.

Nails
Thousands of germs can live under and around fingernails. Be sure to clean areas under fingernails. Fresh nail polish does not result in more germs, but chipped nail polish may carry germs. Fake nails often have more germs under and around them than real nails do.

Keeping Hands Healthy
Skin protects our bodies from chemicals and germs. To do this well, our skin must be healthy. Healthy skin is skin that isn't too dry and doesn't have cuts, scrapes, cracks, or rashes.

Keeping Skin Healthy

- Wash your hands with warm water, **not** hot.
- Rinse your hands well. Soap dries skin.
- Pat your skin dry. **Do not** rub it.
- Use lotions often. Putting lotion on skin when it is damp is helpful.
- Wear gloves and clothing to keep you warm when you are cold.
- Wear gloves to protect your skin when you do things like cleaning and working in the yard.



Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5236