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Stop the Spread of Germs: Keep Your Hands Clean

Why is it important to keep hands clean?

Hands carry and spread germs. Touching your eyes, nose or mouth without first cleaning your hands may let germs into your body. Germs can also spread if a person sneezes or coughs into their hands and then touches an object such as a door handle, subway pole or telephone. The next person who touches these objects may pick up germs and get sick if they do not clean their hands before touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

When should I wash my hands with soap and water?

When hands are visibly dirty.

After:

- sneezing, coughing, blowing your nose
- using the washroom
- handling garbage
- changing diapers
- handling raw foods

Before and after:

- preparing and eating food.
- touching a cut or open sore.
- touching eyes, nose or mouth.

What's the best way to wash hands with soap and water?

Wet hands with warm water and apply soap.

Rub hands together vigorously for 15 seconds.

Scrub entire hand, including back of hands, between fingers and under nails.

Rinse well and dry hands with a towel (in public washrooms use single-use towels) or blow dryer.

Use towel to turn off water taps, if necessary.

When can I use hand sanitizers instead of soap and water?

Hand sanitizers are very useful when soap and water are not available. If your hands are not visibly dirty, then alcohol-based (minimum 60%) hand sanitizers, gels or rinses will reduce germs. If hands are visibly dirty, wash with soap and water. People who are preparing food should wash their hands using soap and water rather than using hand sanitizers.

How do I use a hand sanitizer?

Choose a sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Apply a small amount and rub hands together, spreading the sanitizer over the hands to include fingertips and under fingernails. Rub hands together for at least 15 seconds until the gel feels dry.

Is hand sanitizer safe for children?

Yes. Young children should be supervised to make sure the sanitizer is used properly.

Should I use hand lotion after cleaning my hands?

Yes. Dry skin is not uncommon when you clean your hands often, especially during the winter. Dry skin can crack, which may provide an opening for germs to enter your body. To prevent dry skin, you may use soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with lotion already added or use lotion (water-based is preferred) after cleaning your hands.

Where can I get more information?

Call Toronto Health Connection: 416-338-7600; TTY: 416-392-0658 or visit our website at www.toronto.ca/health.