



Jeb Bush
Governor

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Secretary, Department of Health

PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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A simple way to prevent infection
Hand washing 101: Everything you need to know

In addition to getting a flu shot, there are things you and your family can do to help stay healthy and not get influenza or other infectious diseases. Hand washing is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick.

The dangers of not washing your hands

Throughout the day you accumulate germs on your hands from a variety of sources, such as direct contact with people, contaminated surfaces, foods, even animals and animal waste. If you don't wash your hands frequently enough, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. And you can spread these germs to others by touching them or by touching surfaces that others touch, such as doorknobs.

Infectious diseases that may be prevented by hand washing include the common cold, influenza and other respiratory illness and gastrointestinal disorders such as infectious diarrhea. While most people will get over a cold, the flu can be more serious. Some people with the flu, particularly older adults and individuals with chronic medical problems, can develop pneumonia. The combination of the flu and pneumonia can be deadly.

Proper hand washing techniques

Good hand washing techniques include washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Follow these instructions for washing with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with warm, running water and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Lather well.
- Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 seconds.
- Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel, then
- Use the towel to turn off the faucet.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an excellent alternative to hand washing, particularly when soap and water aren't available. Use only alcohol-based products. To use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply about 1/2 tsp of the product to the palm of your hand.
- Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.
- If your hands are visibly dirty, wash with soap and water rather than a sanitizer.

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Although it's impossible to keep your bare hands germ-free, there are times when it's critical to wash your hands to limit the transfer of bacteria, viruses and other microbes. Be sure to wash your hands:

- After using the bathroom
- After changing a diaper — wash the diaper-wearer's hands, too
- After touching animals or animal waste
- Before and after preparing food, especially raw meat, poultry or fish
- Before eating
- After blowing your nose
- After coughing or sneezing into your hands
- Before and after treating wounds or cuts
- Before and after touching a sick or injured person
- After handling garbage
- Before inserting or removing contact lenses
- When using public restrooms, such as those in airports, train stations, bus stations and restaurants.

Kids need clean hands, too

You can help your children avoid getting sick by showing them how to wash their hands properly and frequently. To get kids into the habit, teach by example. Wash your hands with your children and supervise their hand washing. Tell your children to wash their hands for as long as it takes them to sing a favorite song. This works especially well with younger children, who may rush when washing their hands.

Older children and adolescents also can use alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Younger children can use them, too, with an adult's help. Just make sure your child's hands have completely dried before they touch anything. Store the container safely away after use.

Hand washing is especially important for children who attend daycare. Children in daycare are at greater risk of gastrointestinal diseases, which can easily spread to family members and others in the community.

To protect your child's health, be sure your daycare provider promotes good hygiene, including frequent hand washing or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Ask whether the children are required to wash their hands several times a day, not just before meals. Make sure the sinks are low enough for children to use, or that it has a stool underneath so that children can reach it. Check to see that diapering areas are cleaned after each use and that eating and diapering areas are well separated.

A simple way to stay healthy

Hand washing doesn't take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness. Resolve today to adopt this simple habit as a way to help protect your health.

For more information about preventing illness, visit www.cdc.gov or www.pinellashealth.com

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The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of our community through public and private partnerships in an environment that respects diversity. www.PinellasHealth.com