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## Hand Washing: Why It's So Important

### Why Is Hand Washing So Important?

There's a reason why we hear a lot about hand washing: **Hand washing is by far the best way to keep from getting sick.** That's because it prevents the spread of germs.

### What's the Best Way to Wash Hands?

Here's how to scrub those germs away:

1. **Wet your hands** with clean, running water (warm or cold). Make sure the water isn't too hot.
2. **Use soap.** Lather up for about 20 seconds. Any soap works. It doesn't have to be antibacterial.
3. Make sure you **wash in between your fingers**, on the backs of your hands, and under your nails where germs like to hang out. Don't forget your wrists!
4. **Rinse and dry** well with a clean towel.

### When Should I Wash My Hands?

Make a habit of regular hand washing. It's most important:

- before eating and cooking
- after using the bathroom
- after cleaning around the house
- after touching pets and other animals
- before and after visiting or taking care of sick people
- after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- after being outside

What if you don't have soap and water? Waterless hand sanitizers, soaps, or scrubs are a good alternative. They come as liquids, wipes, sprays, or towelettes. You can buy travel sizes to keep in your book bag, car, locker, purse, or sports bag.

### How Do Clean Hands Help Health?

Good hand washing is the first line of defense against the spread of illnesses. It helps protect you against everything from the common cold to more serious infections, such as meningitis, bronchiolitis, the flu, hepatitis A, and many types of diarrhea.

### How Do Germs Spread?

Germs spread in lots of ways. For example:

- touching dirty hands
- changing dirty diapers
- through contaminated water and food
- through droplets in the air released during a cough or sneeze
- on contaminated surfaces
- through contact with a sick person's body fluids

When you come into contact with germs, you can become infected just by touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Don't forget the power of hand washing! The time you spend at the sink could save you trips to the doctor's office.

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