

Show Me the Science - Why Wash Your Hands?¹

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water.

Germs can get onto hands after people use the toilet, but also in less obvious ways. They can get onto hands if people touch any object that has germs on it because someone coughed or sneezed on it or was touched by some other contaminated object. When these germs get onto hands and are not washed off, they can be passed from person to person and make people sick. Washing hands prevents illnesses and spread of infections to others.

Handwashing with soap removes germs from hands. This helps prevent infections because:

- People frequently touch their eyes, nose, and mouth without even realizing it. Germs can get into the body through the eyes, nose and mouth and make us sick.
- Germs from unwashed hands can get into foods and drinks while people prepare or consume them.
- Germs can multiply in some types of foods or drinks, under certain conditions, and make people sick.
- Germs from unwashed hands can be transferred to other objects, like handrails, table tops, or toys, and then transferred to another person's hands.

Teaching people about handwashing helps them and their communities stay healthy.

Handwashing education in the community:

- Reduces respiratory illnesses, like colds, in the general population by 16-21%
- Reduces absenteeism due to gastrointestinal illness in schoolchildren by 29-57%
- Handwashing education and access to soap in schools can help improve attendance.
- Good handwashing early in life may help improve child development in some settings.

¹ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(2020\). Show Me the Science - Why Wash Your Hands?](#)