



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Public Health – Muskegon County

# Hand Washing Fact Sheet

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## Why is hand washing important?

Hand washing is the single most important thing you can do to prevent the spread of germs. When we are at school, work, daycare, out in public or at home we spread germs mainly by our hands.

Infection occurs when we touch something that has germs and then we touch our eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs can also be spread through cuts on the skin. The cleaner your hands are, the less likely you are to spread germs to yourself or to others.

Hand washing can help reduce the spread of colds and flu and more serious illnesses.

## Does it really matter how I wash my hands?

Yes. Be sure to use enough soap and rub your hands under warm, running water for 20 seconds.

Use a clean paper towel and thoroughly dry your skin and turn off the water with a paper towel rather than your clean hand.

Proper hand washing can make a difference while just rinsing with plain water is ineffective in reducing germs.

## When should I wash my hands?

Many people wash their hands too little. Be sure to wash your hands before you:

- Cook or eat food
- Help a sick person
- Change your contact lenses

Also, be sure to wash your hands after you:

- Use the bathroom
- Change a diaper
- Handle uncooked foods

It is also important to wash your hands after you:

- Wipe your nose
- Cough
- Sneeze

If you are caring for a sick person, taking out the garbage, or handling animal waste it is necessary to wash your hands.

## What about the alcohol based hand rubs?

Alcohol based hand rubs are recommended for use in-between regular hand washing. They are an effective way of eliminating germs if soap and water facilities are not available. Soap and water use is the preferred method for hand washing but it can be substituted if necessary.

Please use caution when using the rubs. The alcohol based rubs can be flammable. It is important that they are used as directed.

## For more information on handwashing:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),  
[www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/](http://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/)

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