

# Hand Washing

*“The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;  
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.”*

Psalm 18:20

Until 100 years ago, the link between hand washing and the transmission of disease was unknown. Now, we know that simple hand washing is one of the most effective weapons against disease. Washing your hands not only protects others from germs you might pass on, but protects you as well.

The link between hand washing and the spread of germs was not recognized by physicians until the early 1900's. Prior to that time, some of the resistance to hand washing sprang from the association of water and disease, such as malaria and typhoid fever. Also, with the lack of indoor plumbing, the act of hand washing was not a simple matter. Water had to be drawn and carried in, and then heated. Luckily, we live in an age where keeping our hands clean is a simple matter. “Hand washing is the single most important means of preventing the spread of infection,” according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

While knowledge is a wonderful thing, it doesn't help us unless we put it into practice. In hospitals, where the value of clean hands is well known, current estimates by the CDC state that 5-15% of all hospital patients will acquire a secondary infection during their hospital stay. A hospital is not the only place where the practice of hand washing needs to be constant. Day care centers, nursing homes, and restaurants are places where good hand hygiene is a must.

In this day of running water and soap being available virtually everywhere, it is surprising that we still see unacceptable numbers of people being infected because germs were carried from one person to another on contaminated hands. Infections from mishandled food, including Salmonella infections, affect over 80 million people a year in the United States alone! The knowledge of infection control and the ready availability of soap and water are a beginning, but they give us no protection when people don't use them.

This handy list comes from the web site, [Kidshealth.org](http://Kidshealth.org), and gives invaluable tips for keeping yourself and those around you healthy.

## **Wash your hands:**

- **After using the bathroom**
- **After blowing your nose or coughing into your hand**
- **Before eating, serving, or preparing food**
- **After touching pets or animals**

- **After outdoor activities**
- **Before and after visiting someone who is sick**
- **When your hands are dirty**
- **After changing a diaper**

Hand washing must be done correctly to be of value. Rinsing your hands under water for a few seconds does **not** count! Start with warm water, and use soap. Antibacterial soap is not needed for everyday hand washing. Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces, including nail beds. Friction is a great tool for dislodging germs and sending them down the drain. Keep this up for 15-20 seconds—about the time it takes to sing a chorus of “Old McDonald” or to say The Lord’s Prayer. Rinse well, and if you are in a public restroom, use a paper towel to touch faucet and toilet handles, and also the door out of the rest room. Many people have touched these surfaces before you, and you can bet they didn’t all wash their hands first. When soap and water are not available, the waterless hand gels and wipes are a good choice.

### **Protect yourself—Wash Your Hands!**

Check out:

<http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/handwashing/hw.htm>.

This site has downloadable educational materials regarding hand washing.