

A reminder: Washing your hands properly is not just for laboratory or workshop staff & students

Frequently washing your hands especially before eating is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of many common seasonal illnesses (flu, gastric etc) or contaminated things that you may have touched.

Basic soap and water is as good at cleaning your hands as any hand disinfectant or sanitiser, but the sad reality is, about 25% of people don't wash their hands at all, and of those who do, they don't wash them frequently or adequately enough. In fact, those who do wash their hands, on average do so for only around 10 seconds which at best will remove about 90% of germs. It should take about 30 seconds to wash your hands adequately (steps 1-9 below)., The problem is the remaining bacteria will grow and can double in number in less than 20 minutes! It doesn't matter what you use to wash your hands, if your technique is poor then your hands will not be clean.

The 10 steps of Good hand-washing:

1. Thoroughly wet hands
2. Apply soap or cleanser
3. Rub your hands palm to palm
4. Rub your palms over back of each hand, interlacing your fingers
5. Rub palm to palm with interlaced fingers
6. circle tips of fingers into the opposite palm
7. clean your thumbs
8. clean your wrists
9. rinse thoroughly
10. pat dry, preferably with disposable paper towels. (Where possible, try to avoid electronic hand driers.)

Make sure you clean under rings too, that's where many germs hide.

Practice other good health habits as well:

- Always wash your hands before you eat or prepare food
- Sneeze or cough into sleeve/elbow, or cover your nose and mouth with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the bin
- Wash your hands often with soap and water especially after you cough or sneeze, and after using the toilet
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to help prevent the spread of germs
- Always clean your hands after using public touchscreen technology, surfaces in public spaces, and especially before eating

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces

Surfaces that are touched by many people every single day steadily collect bacteria and viruses from users. Much of the germs found on surfaces in public areas originate from peoples' intestines, gut, nose, mouth, throat, and faeces (eg *Enterococcus faecalis*, *staphylococcus*, *E-coli*, norovirus, cold and flu viruses) as a result of poor hand hygiene!

These surfaces can include: telephones, taps, door handles, computer keyboards, stair and escalator handrails, lift buttons, public transport, and in particular, touch screen technology – think tablets, self-help kiosks to check-in at airports, checkout at grocery stores and place orders eg at McDonald's restaurants.

Touching these sorts of surfaces can significantly compromise your hand hygiene, so wash your hands as soon as possible after touching these, and especially before eating or preparing food.