

Handwashing with soap

Introduction

However well built and sustained a water supply or sanitation facility may be, the benefits to health will not be fully realised unless basic hygiene measures are also in place.

Handwashing is one of the most important behaviours which will reduce the incidence of faecal-oral diseases, and washing hands with soap is the most effective way of cleaning them. This note presents a simple handwashing procedure for children and adults alike.



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Why promote handwashing with soap?

Hands transport diseases from person to person either directly, or indirectly across surfaces.

Hands that have been in contact with faeces, nasal excretions and other bodily fluids, and not then washed thoroughly with soap, can carry viruses, bacteria and other parasites. They also carry pathogens from contaminated sources such as animal or bird faeces, contaminated foods, or from domestic or wild animals to new susceptible hosts.

Handwashing is especially important where people congregate – such as at school – where harmful organisms are more easily transmitted.

In many countries, the biggest killers of young children are respiratory infections and diarrhoeal disease. Both can be prevented by handwashing.

Many reviews report a significant reduction in the risk of diarrhoea as a result of handwashing with soap.

Why use soap?

Grease and dirt contain the largest concentrations of microbes. The chemical nature of soap, and the friction resulting from using it, breaks down the grease and dirt, and harmful organisms are washed away as the hands are rinsed with water.

Handwashing practice

Hands should be washed with soap and under water for at least 20 seconds.

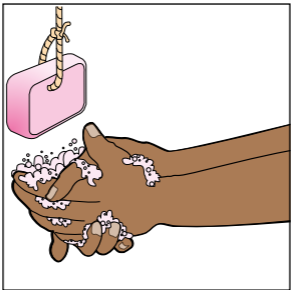
Special attention needs to be paid to germs that may be trapped under nails and in crevices.

All traces of soap should be removed with water and the hands should be dried, or allowed to dry, after cleansing and before coming into contact with anything else. Follow the steps below.

1. Wet hands with water



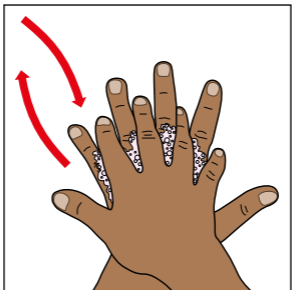
2. Apply soap to cover all surfaces of the hands



3. Rub hands palm to palm



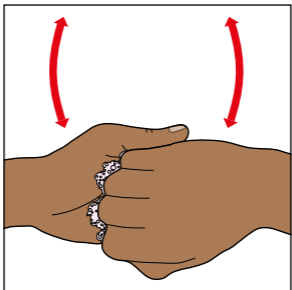
4. Rub each palm over the back of the other hand



5. Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced



6. Rub backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



- 7. Rub each thumb clasped in opposing palm**



- 8. Clasp fingers and circular rub opposing palm**



9. Rinse well with water



**Allow hands to dry completely
before touching anything else**

Source

REED, R. A. and SHAW, R.J. 2008.
*Sanitation for Primary Schools in
Africa*, Loughborough, UK: WEDC,
Loughborough University.

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Designed and produced by WEDC

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