

# Hand Hygiene in Emergency Situations

**CDC REPRINT**

**\*\*September 2021\*\***

After an emergency, it can be difficult to find running water. However, it is still important to wash your hands to avoid illness. It is best to wash your hands with soap and water but when water isn't available, you can use alcohol-based products made for washing hands. Below are some tips for washing your hands with soap and water and with alcohol-based products.

## **When should you wash your hands?**

1. Before preparing or eating food.
2. After going to the bathroom.
3. After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom.
4. Before and after tending to someone who is sick.
5. After handling uncooked foods, particularly raw meat, poultry, or fish.
6. After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
7. After handling an animal or animal waste.
8. After handling garbage.
9. Before and after treating a cut or wound.

## **Techniques for Hand Hygiene with Alcohol-Based Products**

When hands are visibly dirty, they should be washed with soap and water when available.

However, if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based product to clean your hands. When using an alcohol-based hand rub, apply product to palm of one hand and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers, until hands are dry. Note that the volume needed to reduce the number of bacteria on hands varies by product.

Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast acting.

## **Techniques for Hand Washing with Soap and Water**

Proper techniques to use when washing your hands with soap and water:

1. Place your hands together under water (warm water if possible).
2. Rub your hands together for at least 15-20 seconds (with soap if possible). Wash all surfaces well, including wrists, palms, backs of hands, fingers, and under the fingernails.
3. Clean the dirt from under your fingernails.



4. Rinse the soap from your hands.
5. Dry your hands completely with a clean towel if possible (this helps remove the germs). However, if towels are not available it is okay to air dry your hands.
6. Pat your skin rather than rubbing to avoid chapping and cracking.
7. If you use a disposable towel, throw it in the trash.

