

Hand Washing: How and Why

Kari Ausloos

A recent study published in *Nature* (June, 2012) reported that about 100 trillion bacteria – three or four pounds worth – live on the human body, and they are more than just passive travelers. While most of these germs do good things for your health, your bacteria are not the same as others. You count on your hands to do your dirty, as well as clean, work. You comfort a baby with your hands...and change their diaper. You wash dishes with your hands and take out the garbage. You prepare raw chicken for cooking and put the finishes touches on a birthday cake.

Hand washing is the best way to avoid getting or passing along [infectious diseases](#) such as colds, the flu and even more serious diseases, according to Kayla Ericksen, RN, BSN, an infection preventionist with Agnesian HealthCare.

“Many Americans can benefit from proper [hand washing](#) techniques,” Ericksen says. “We can all learn to be more effective. For example, one study using video cameras found that one of every three women and two of every three men neglected to wash their hands after using a restroom. Yet when questioned, more than 90 percent claimed they do wash their hands after going to the restroom.”



When to Wash

- Before eating
- When you've come in contact with a sick person
- After using the restroom
- Before preparing food
- After touching raw meats and other foods
- When you've coughed or sneezed
- After handling garbage
- After you've taken medication or treated a sore on your skin
- Before inserting or removing contact lenses

How to Wash

- Turn on warm water
- Apply soap, lathering all over hands, in between fingers, under the nails and up the wrists. Take at least 15-20 seconds or the time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song.
- Dry thoroughly with a clean towel or paper towel
- If hands are not visibly soiled a hand sanitizer can be used apply about a dime sized amount on your hands rubbing in on all surfaces, it takes about 10 seconds to dry.

