

FACT SHEET

Hand washing to prevent influenza

Next to immunization, the single most important way to prevent influenza is to wash your hands often.

Make a habit of washing your hands often. This is especially important after you have been in contact with someone who has a cold or influenza. You should also wash your hands after being around children, because children easily spread influenza in the community. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth, since the virus can enter your body through these openings. Wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub.

How to wash your hands properly with soap

1. Use liquid soap or a clean bar of soap. Wet your hands with warm, running water. Rub on soap. Lather well. You don't need antibacterial soap; regular soap is fine.
2. Rub your hands together briskly for at least 15 seconds.
3. Scrub all over, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers, and under your fingernails.
4. Rinse under running water.
5. Dry with a clean towel.

If you are in a public restroom, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet after you finish so you won't have to touch the taps.

Store liquid soaps in closed containers. Wash and dry the containers before you fill them. To prevent bacteria from getting in, do not top up partially empty containers.

If you are a parent, teacher, day-care provider or other child caregiver, teach children proper hand

washing habits by example. Wash hands with your children or watch them as they wash their hands. Place hand-washing reminders at a child's eye level. Post a chart by the bathroom sink where children can mark each time they wash their hands.

How to wash your hands properly with alcohol-based hand rubs

You don't need water to use alcohol-based hand rubs. They are an excellent alternative to hand washing, especially when soap and water aren't available. Pharmacies have them available in a variety of sizes, including purse size.

Alcohol-based hand rubs actually work better than hand washing to kill bacteria and viruses if used properly. They cause less skin dryness and irritation than hand washing. However, hand rubs are not effective if hands are soiled. If your hands are dirty, use soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use a towelette that contains detergent. Then use a hand rub. *Not all hand rubs are the same. Use only alcohol-based products.*

INFLUENZA SELF-CARE



HAND WASHING TO PREVENT INFLUENZA

To use an alcohol-based hand rub:

1. Read the instructions on the label.
2. Put some of the rub on the palm of your hand and rub your hands together.
3. Cover all surfaces, including fingers and wrists, and rub until dry (about 15 to 25 seconds).

Young children can use hand rubs if you help them. Make sure the rub has completely dried before the child touches anything. This will prevent them from taking in alcohol from hand-to-mouth contact. Store the container safely away after use.

Wash your hands BEFORE:

- preparing, serving or eating food, or feeding others.
- brushing or flossing your teeth.
- putting in or taking out contact lenses.
- treating wounds or cuts — and after.

Wash your hands AFTER:

- any contact with a person who has influenza or with their immediate environment.
- using the toilet, helping a child to use the toilet, or changing a diaper.
- blowing your nose or wiping a child's nose.
- coughing or sneezing.
- handling garbage.

Children should wash their hands after playing with toys shared with other children. Hand washing is especially important for children who attend daycare.

To protect your children's health:

- Make sure your day-care provider promotes good hygiene, including frequent hand washing or supervised use of alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Ask whether or not the children are required to clean their hands often; not only before meals.
- Make sure the sink is within reach for children to use.
- Make sure soap and paper towels are near the sink.

For more information contact:

Health Link Alberta

Edmonton, call 408-LINK (5465)

Calgary, call 943-LINK (5465)

Outside Edmonton and Calgary local calling areas, call toll-free 1-866-408-LINK (5465)

visit: www.healthlinkalberta.ca

Public Health Centres

(Monday - Friday, daytime hours), or
physicians or pharmacists

Alberta Health and Wellness

visit: www.health.gov.ab.ca

(Contact information)