

How to clean / wash your hands

You can help to stop the spread of bacteria and viruses that cause infection by simply cleaning your hands.

Every day in Ireland, hundreds of people get sick because of healthcare-associated infections. These infections can cause serious illness and sometimes even death.

Having clean hands is the best way to stop the spread of harmful germs.

About 30% to 50% of infections that start in hospitals can be avoided.

Clean your hands

Use soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser to clean your hands regularly.

Many hand sanitisers are alcohol based and highly flammable. Do not use alcohol based sanitiser near heat or a naked flame.

How to wash your hands with soap and water

1. Wet your hands with warm water and apply soap.
2. Rub your hands together palm to palm until the soap forms a lather.
3. Rub the back of one hand with your palm and fingers spread so you wash between fingers. Repeat with the other hand.
4. Interlock the top of your hands and rub your fingertips - this cleans your fingertips and knuckles.
5. Then finally grasp your thumb tightly and twist to make sure your thumbs are cleaned. Repeat with the other hand.
6. This should take at least 20 seconds.
7. Rinse your hands under running water.
8. Dry your hands with a clean towel or paper towel.

If you have dry skin or a skin condition, apply moisturiser after washing your hands and at night.

Hand hygiene at home

When you're at home or not in hospital, make sure you clean your hands:

- after you use the toilet
- once you clean up after your pet
- before you prepare food, handle food or eat
- after touching raw meat
- after you use public transport
- when you get home after meeting lots of people

Cleaning your hands can help you avoid:

- colds and flu
- tummy bugs that cause diarrhoea, such as norovirus
- eye infections such as conjunctivitis
- superbugs such as MRSA and VRE

Many of these infections are common in children. Parents and childcare workers should always make sure children clean their hands regularly