Wash Up for Health and Safety



Safety Talk

Are you interested in avoiding common illnesses such as colds, the flu and gastrointestinal upsets? Would you prefer to avoid serious chronic and acute illnesses caused by chemical exposures?

If so, you should develop the habit of washing your hands frequently and thoroughly. Illnesses are often spread by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose, or handling food. In addition, chemicals on your hands can enter your body after you touch food, beverages, dishes, glasses, utensils, cigarettes, cosmetics and other objects.

When to wash:

- Always wash up before eating.
- Wash your hands before preparing food to prevent food poisoning and the spread of disease. Wash before you handle each different food. For example, wash between cutting the raw chicken and dicing the vegetables.
- Always wash your hands after using the toilet. If you have been handling chemicals, wash before using the toilet, too.
- Wash your hands before handling contact lenses or applying makeup.

How to wash:

- Take off watches, bracelets and rings.
- Wet your hands and forearms using a stream of warm running water.
- Lather thoroughly with the recommended cleanser such as soap. Plain soap and warm water is good enough for most hand washing, providing it is done properly.
- Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds. Scrub your wrists, the front and back of your hands and your fingers. Clean under your fingernails.
- Rinse well under warm running water.
- Repeat the washing and rinsing steps if necessary.
- Dry your hands completely on a one-use towel or under an air drier.
- Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door without contaminating your hands again.

If you work in healthcare or food services, you will be following a strict handwashing routine to prevent the spread of illness.

If your work requires you to wash your hands frequently you might develop problems with dry, irritated skin. Skin excessively dry from washing is prone to infection.

Apply moisturizers frequently to prevent chapping.

Talk to your supervisor about the use of protective gloves and barrier creams if appropriate for your work. Avoid chemical contact with your skin. Use the correct procedures and the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent exposure. An important part of protecting yourself against chemical exposure is to wash thoroughly after you remove PPE such as gloves.

Infection control researchers keep coming to the same conclusion: We don’t wash our hands often enough or well enough. Continued research into chemical exposures also reinforces the importance of handwashing, along with all other precautions.