

The holiday season is here and with it comes holiday parties and lots of visiting family and friends. It is a season of great joy and also the cold, flu and stomach upset season! Did you know that many infectious diseases are frequently spread through hand-to-hand contact? Yes, the common cold, flu, and gastrointestinal disorders like infectious diarrhea are just a few. Yet, simple hand washing is one of the most important tools you have to fight off these diseases.

What are the hand washing basics? This country's expert on infectious diseases, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that we all wash our hands regularly. We should always wash our hands:

- Before and after preparing food
- Before and after eating food
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- Before and after taking care of a sick person
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After handling an animal or cleaning up after an animal
- After handling garbage
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- Before inserting or removing contact lenses

How do you wash your hands? The CDC recommends the following steps when you wash your hands with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if available.
- Rub hands together, lather up and scrub every bit of your hands.
- Continue rubbing hands for 20 seconds. No timer around? Hum or sing the Happy Birthday song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel or an air dryer. If possible use your paper towel to turn off the faucet.

If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based (at least 60% alcohol) hand sanitizer to clean your hands. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast-acting. When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply product to the palm of one hand.
- Rub hands together.
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

This Holiday Season remember to wash your hands. Hand washing is the single most important thing you can do to halt those germs dead in their tracks. Have a safe and healthy holiday season.