

Proper handwashing is the single most effective way to stop the spread of infection.

Every time you touch your hands to your mouth you can get sick. Eating, smoking, nail-biting, thumb-sucking, handling food, and touching toys are all ways germs can spread.

Even shaking a hand or opening a door can transfer germs to you.

**MAKE  
HANDWASHING  
A FREQUENT HABIT  
AND REDUCE YOUR  
RISK OF GETTING  
SICK.**

How to keep  
Good Health  
in Your Hands:

It is important to teach children when and how to wash their hands. One of the best ways for them to learn is for you to set a good example with proper, frequent handwashing.

Some additional suggestions to encourage proper handwashing:

- ☛ Make a game of handwashing. Remember that the person who takes the longest has killed the most germs.
- ☛ Use stickers or other small rewards to help make handwashing a regular habit for kids.
- ☛ Pack paper towels, soap or pre-wet cloths for playgrounds, petting zoos, and other road trips.
- ☛ Let children use special soap or soap containers to encourage the idea that handwashing is fun.



FROM THE  
**MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY  
AND ALLIANCE**

# HAND WASHING

## FOR BETTER HEALTH



# WHY

## should you wash your hands?

Bacteria and viruses (germs) that cause illnesses are spread when you don't wash your hands.

If you don't wash your hands, you risk acquiring:

- ☛ the common cold or flu
- ☛ gastrointestinal illnesses
- ☛ shigella or hepatitis A
- ☛ respiratory illnesses.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health estimates that every year, poor handwashing results in:

- ☛ one million Massachusetts residents experiencing upset stomachs and/or diarrhea
- ☛ 60,000 hospitalizations
- ☛ 250 deaths
- ☛ \$400 million in health care costs related to poor handwashing.

# WHEN

## should you wash your hands?

You need to wash your hands several times every day. Some important times for you and your family to wash your hands are:

### BEFORE:

- ☛ preparing or eating food
- ☛ treating a cut or wound
- ☛ tending to someone who is sick
- ☛ inserting or removing a contact lens

### AFTER:

- ☛ using the bathroom
- ☛ changing a diaper or helping a child use the bathroom (don't forget the child's hands)
- ☛ handling raw meats, poultry, or eggs
- ☛ touching pets, especially reptiles
- ☛ handling garbage
- ☛ sneezing or blowing your nose, or helping a child blow his or her nose
- ☛ touching any body fluids like blood or mucus
- ☛ being in contact with a sick person
- ☛ playing outside or with children and their toys

# HOW

## should you wash your hands?

There is a right way to wash your hands. Follow these steps and you will help protect yourself and your family from illness.

Like any good habit, proper handwashing must be taught. Take the time to teach it to your children and make sure they practice.

### STEP 1:

Use warm running water and plenty of soap. The soap doesn't have to be antibacterial.

### STEP 2:

Rub hands together for at least 15 to 20 seconds to make a good lather. Make sure you scrub under your fingernails and the backs of your hands.

### STEP 3:

Rinse well.

### STEP 4:

Dry your hands thoroughly. At home, provide each child with his or her own clean towel or paper towels. Use the towel to shut off the water faucet. Keep the faucet handles clean.