

Clean

The most important thing that you can do to keep from getting sick is to wash your hands. By frequently washing your hands you wash away germs that you have picked up from other people, or from contaminated surfaces, or from animals and animal waste.

What happens if you do not wash your hands frequently?

You pick up germs from other sources and then you infect yourself when you

- Touch your eyes
- Or your nose
- Or your mouth.

One of the most common ways people catch colds is by rubbing their nose or their eyes after their hands have been contaminated with the cold virus. You can also spread germs directly to others or onto surfaces that other people touch. And before you know it, everybody around you is getting sick.

The important thing to remember is that, in addition to colds, some pretty serious diseases -- like hepatitis A, meningitis, and infectious diarrhea -- can easily be prevented if people make a habit of washing their hands.

When should you wash your hands?

You should wash your hands often. Probably more often than you do now because you can't see germs with the naked eye or smell them, so you do not really know where they are hiding.

It is especially important to wash your hands:

- Before, during, and after you prepare food
- Before you eat, and after you use the bathroom
- After handling animals or animal waste
- When your hands are dirty
- More frequently when someone in your home is sick.

What is the correct way to wash your hands?

- First wet your hands and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Place the bar soap on a rack and allow it to drain.
- Next rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue for 10 - 15 seconds or about the length of a little tune. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.
- Rinse well and dry your hands.

It is estimated that one out of three people do not wash their hands after using the restroom. So these tips are also important when you are out in public.

Washing your hands regularly can certainly save a lot on medical bills. Because it costs less than a penny, you could say that this penny's worth of prevention can save you a \$50 visit to the doctor.

Another way to help you keep the germs away is to routinely clean and disinfect surfaces.

What is the difference between cleaning and disinfecting?

Cleaning and disinfecting are not the same thing. In most cases, cleaning with soap and water is adequate. It removes dirt and most of the germs. However, in other situations disinfecting provides an extra margin of safety.

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You should disinfect areas where there are a lot of dangerous germs and a possibility that they will be spread to others. That is because disinfectants, including solutions of household bleach, have ingredients that destroy bacteria and other germs. While surfaces may look clean, many infectious germs may be lurking around. Given the right conditions some germs can live on surfaces for hours and even for days.

Do you know where the "hot zones", or the contaminated areas, are in your home?

The kitchen is one of the most dangerous places in the house because of the infectious bacteria that are sometimes found in raw food such as chicken. Also, there is a potential for germs to be spread to other people because that is where food is prepared. You cannot always tell where or when germs are hiding. When you touch a contaminated object you can contaminate other surfaces that you touch afterwards and spread the germs to others.

Another potential hot zone is the bathroom. Routinely cleaning and disinfecting the bathroom reduces odors and may help prevent the spread of germs when someone in the house has diarrhea. Also, do not forget your child's changing table and diaper pail.

What is the best way to routinely clean and disinfect surfaces?

- You should follow the directions on the cleaning product labels. And be sure to read safety precautions as well.
- If you are cleaning up body fluids such as blood, vomit, or feces, you should wear rubber gloves, particularly if you have cuts or scratches on your hands or if a family member has AIDS, Hepatitis B, or another bloodborne disease. And it is also a good idea to clean and disinfect surfaces when someone in the home is sick.
- To begin, clean the surface thoroughly with soap and water or another cleaner
- After cleaning, if you need to use a disinfectant, apply it to the area, and let it stand for a few minutes or longer, depending on the manufacturer's recommendations. This keeps the germs in contact with the disinfectant longer.
- Wipe the surface with paper towels that can be thrown away or cloth towels that can be washed afterwards.
- Store cleaners and disinfectants out of the reach of children.
- And remember, even if you use gloves; wash your hands after cleaning or disinfecting surfaces.