

How to Wash Hands

Washing your hands is especially important in the fight against infection. It is particularly important to teach athletes and children correct handwashing. **Handwashing is the single most important behavior in preventing infectious disease like staph/MRSA.**

Handwashing and cleanliness should be emphasized:

- before touching your eyes, nose, mouth, or any cut or scrape on the skin;¹
- before and after close contact with another person;
- before and after assisting a child on the toilet or with diaper changing;
- after using the toilet;
- after sneezing, blowing, or touching your nose or assisting a child with his/her nose; and
- after arriving home from daycare, school, or other activities.²

Hands should be washed with soap and water, or an **alcohol-based hand sanitizer** may be used as a supplement or substitute when soap and water are not available. Look for a hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol in it.³ Follow the manufacturer's directions. Generally, directions for hand sanitizers require placing enough hand sanitizer in the palm of your hand to thoroughly cover your entire hand and rubbing hands together until dry.²

Provide and encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers to wash hands immediately if your child or

athlete comes into contact with any body fluid on the playing field or at other places where handwashing facilities are not available.¹

Note: **Plain soap** and water are best. **Antibacterial soaps are NOT needed.** Antibacterial soaps may contain triclosan, a chemical that kills both bad and good bacteria. While bad bacteria can make you sick or cause infection, good bacteria can help you. The triclosan in antibacterial soaps may change the balance of bacteria on your skin and may even make bacteria harder to kill.⁴

Steps for Hand Washing:

1. Use warm water.
2. Wet hands and wrists.
3. Use a bar or liquid soap.
4. Work soap into a lather, and wash between fingers, up wrists, and under fingernails for at least 15 seconds. For young children, have them sing the alphabet (abc) song; twinkle, twinkle little star; or twice through the happy birthday song.² If no hot water is available, wash longer.
5. Dry using a clean cloth towel or paper towel.^{1,2}



Note: It is a good idea to turn off the faucet with a paper towel since you have to turn it on before cleaning your hands. A paper towel is preferable in environments where cloth towels would be shared. Be sure to dispose of the paper towel properly.

Sources:

1. Texas Department of State Health Services (2006). Information on staphylococcal infections for school athletic departments. Retrieved October 5, 2006. From http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/health/antibiotic_resistance/mrsa/mrsaathleticdepartment.pdf.
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3. Texas Department of State Health Services (2006). Antibiotic resistance – Questions and answers [on-line]. Retrieved October 5, 2006. From http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/health/antibiotic_resistance/educational/AntibioticResistanceQA_%20Edu_Flyer.pdf.
4. Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (2006). What should I use to wash my hands? Retrieved October 6, 2005. From <http://www.tpchd.org/files/library/12b59c64cf77a8a0.pdf>.

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