Clean Hands Save Lives: Emergency Situations

After an emergency, finding running water can be difficult. However, keeping your hands clean helps you avoid getting sick. It is best to wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. However, when water is not available, you can use alcohol-based hand products made for washing hands (sanitizers).

When should you wash your hands?

- Before preparing or eating food
- After going to the bathroom
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- After handling uncooked foods, particularly raw meat, poultry, or fish
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After handling an animal or animal waste
- After handling garbage
- Before and after treating a cut or wound

Using alcohol-based hand sanitizers

When your hands are visibly dirty, you should wash them with soap and water when available. However, if soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

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

Note: the volume needed to reduce the number of germs on hands varies by product.

Washing with soap and water

1. Place your hands together under water (warm water if possible).
2. Rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds (with soap if possible). Wash all surfaces well, including wrists, palms, backs of hands, fingers, and under the fingernails.
3. Clean the dirt from under your fingernails.
4. Rinse the soap from your hands.
5. Dry your hands completely with a clean towel if possible (this helps remove the germs). However, if towels are not available it is okay to air dry your hands.
6. Pat your skin rather than rubbing to avoid chapping and cracking.
7. If you use a disposable towel, throw it in the trash.

Remember: If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters,
or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).