Hand hygiene has been an important practice for centuries. And, since its establishment in 1926, the American Cleaning Institute® has been a leader in educating the public about hand hygiene and its impact on preventing illness. According to the World Health Organization, “Hand hygiene is the primary measure to reduce infections…”

Just imagine what life would be like if we didn’t clean our hands …

It’s Monday morning …
You catch the early train to work. Taking public transportation is a great way to meet a lot of new, interesting people, but opening a door or holding that handrail can also put you “in touch” with many of their germs!

You arrive at your office …
To your pleasant surprise, the company tech person is installing your new email program! The only thing is, she has a cold. After a couple of sniffles, coughs, and keystrokes, she “hands” you your keyboard and says, “login, please.” Instead of “you’ve got mail,” you’ve got germs!

As you can see, there’s plenty of opportunity for germs to sneak up on us when we least expect them. But, frequent and proper hand hygiene can stop germs and illness in their tracks. Read on to find out how hand cleaning products can help!

Hand hygiene products come in many forms – each having its own benefits. Look for easy, convenient, portable, and refillable packaging options. Select the form that best suits your needs.

- **Bar Soaps**: Designed to clean the skin by removing dirt and oils.
- **Hand Sanitizers**: Designed to kill germs on hands that are not visibly dirty, without the need for water or towels.
- **Liquid or Foaming Hand Soaps**: Designed to dispense a single “dose” for cleaning hands.
- **Wipes**: Designed to wipe away dirt from hands.

Remember to Read the Label! Product labels may contain information about ingredients, proper use and other useful information, such as how to contact the product manufacturer with questions.

Ingredients are listed on product packaging. The following are common ingredients used in many hand hygiene products. Not all products contain all ingredients.

- **Cleaning Agents/Surfactants**: Lift dirt and soil and help remove germs from hands.
- **Moisturizers**: Leave hands feeling soft and smooth.
- **Fragrances**: Give consumers a choice of pleasing scents.
- **Antibacterial/Germ-killing Agents**: Help kill germs that may cause odors or illness. Some of the more frequently used ingredients are:
  - Triclocarban – used in bar soaps
  - Triclosan – used in bar and liquid soaps
  - Alcohol – used in hand sanitizers and hand wipes
  - Benzalkonium chloride – used in hand sanitizers and hand wipes
  - Benzethonium chloride – used in hand sanitizers and hand wipes

Safety First

- Always read and follow instructions on all products before using.
- Avoid contact with eyes. In case of eye contact, flush with water.
- Hand hygiene products are intended for external use only. If swallowed, get medical help or call the number on the product label or the U.S. Poison Control Center’s toll-free hotline at 1-800-222-1222. To locate a provincial Poison Control Center in Canada, visit [www.healthycleaning101.org/english/safety.html](http://www.healthycleaning101.org/english/safety.html).

Got a question about this topic?
info@cleaninginstitute.org
CLEAN HANDS

SMART CLEANING: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: When should I use antibacterial vs. non-antibacterial products?

A: Antibacterial soaps and hand sanitizers are designed to offer the extra protection of killing germs, so it’s best to use them in situations when you are most concerned about germs, such as preparing food, when you or others are ill, or when touching or cleaning after pets.

Q: Do hand sanitizers really help kill germs? When should I use them?

A: Hand sanitizers are an easy, portable way to help kill germs on hands, but they are not designed to remove dirt or grime. Hand sanitizers are a good alternative to use when soap and water aren’t available.

The convenience and ease-of-use of instant hand sanitizers can enable everyone to get rid of germs on hands more frequently throughout the day. Several studies show that the use of hand sanitizers reduces absenteeism in schools due to illnesses, as well as decreases the incidences of hospital-associated infections.

Q: Are hand soaps, sanitizers, and wipes safe for children?

A: When used as directed, hand hygiene products are safe for children. Keep in mind that when using personal care products, young children should be supervised. In addition, supervising adults should be sure to read and follow instructions on all products before use.

Q: Why is handwashing important and where can I learn more?

A: Handwashing is one of the most important steps to stop the spread of infection. A recent study shows that simple handwashing with soap can reduce the number of pneumonia-related infections in children under the age of five by more than 50 percent.

For education materials, use the Healthy Schools, Healthy People – It’s a SNAP program at www.itsasnap.org and The 15 Second Challenge at www.healthycleaning101.org/english/hands.html.

References