

Hand Sanitizer vs. Handwashing: Which is Better?

Every time you touch an object or shake someone's hand, you are picking up bacteria and potential viruses too. It has been estimated that around 1,500 bacteria are living on each square centimeter of skin on our hands. Areas such as underneath the fingernails and between the fingers often harbor even more. It is very easy for these germs and viruses to make their way to your mouth, nose and eyes and then make you sick.

Hand Sanitizer

Hand sanitizers are available in various forms such as gels, foams, alcohol-based and all-natural. It's important that the type of hand sanitizer you choose contains a minimum of 60% alcohol—the minimum amount to be effective. While alcohol based hand sanitizers are effective, they don't "kill" all germs like norovirus, giardia, and diarrhea causing bacterium *Clostridium difficile*. Additionally, while hand sanitizers may kill the germs, it **does not remove** the germs from your hands. Only proper handwashing will remove the germs from your hands. However, hand sanitizer is still a good option if you can't wash your hands or you don't have access to clean water. To use hand sanitizer effectively, apply to the palm of one hand, then rub it all over your hands until they are dry covering all parts of your hands and nails.



Handwashing

Proper handwashing is truly the "gold standard" to removing and killing germs on your hands. Handwashing actually kills germs and removes dirt, debris, and spores that could make you sick. Any soap that lathers works in killing and removing germs. In fact, popular antibacterial soaps don't have any added benefit and may actually promote antibiotic-resistant germs. When washing your hands, use warm water as it removes germs better than cold water. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds as it's the rubbing of your hands together that removes the germs. Additionally, remember to dry your hands completely. If your hands are still wet, you will pick up and transmit germs very easily.

Germ Hotspots in the Office

- **Desk.** A typical desk is one of the least hygienic places in the office with 400 times more bacteria than the average toilet seat. One study found the bacteria *Staphylococcus* (the bacteria responsible for skin infections, food poisoning, blood poisoning, toxic shock syndrome and septic arthritis) on 60% of desks.
- **Keyboard and Mouse.** One study found more than 3,000 micro-organisms per square inch on keyboards and over 1,600 bacteria per square inch on a computer mouse.
- **Door Handles.** Door handles are one of the most touched spots in the office and the chief spreader of viruses like norovirus. Norovirus and other viruses can be spread to surfaces around the office if someone doesn't wash their hands after going to the bathroom. (A study conducted found that 25% of office workers do not wash their hands after going to the bathroom.) It's best to grab those door handles with a paper towel.
- **Copy Machine.** Everyone uses the copy machine, so you can pick up whatever germs are on someone else's hands, meaning that a cold or flu virus can be transferred to you.



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