

Personal Hygiene and Handwashing After a Disaster or Emergency

Good basic personal hygiene and handwashing are critical to help prevent the spread of illness and disease. Clean, safe running water is essential for proper hygiene and handwashing.

Hygiene is especially important in an emergency such as a flood, hurricane, or earthquake, but finding clean, safe running water can sometimes be difficult. The following information will help to ensure good hygiene and handwashing in the event of an emergency.

Disaster Supplies Kit (Hygiene Supplies)

- Before an emergency, make sure you have created a Disaster Supplies Kit.

Handwashing

Keeping hands clean during an emergency helps prevent the spread of germs. If your tap water is not safe to use, wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected. Follow these steps to make sure you wash your hands properly:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold) and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together to make a lather and scrub them well; be sure to scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

A temporary hand washing station can be created by using a large water jug that contains clean water (for example, boiled or disinfected).

Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to reduce the number of germs on them. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but sanitizers **do not** eliminate all types of germs.

Hand sanitizers are not effective when hands are visibly dirty.

Dental Hygiene

- Brushing your teeth after a water-related emergency should only be done with clean, safe water. Listen to local authorities to find out if tap water is safe to use.
- Visit the [Safe Drinking Water for Personal Use](#) page for more information about making your water safe for brushing your teeth.
- You may visit [CDC's Oral Health](#) Web site for complete dental hygiene information.

Wound Care

Keeping wounds clean and covered is crucial during an emergency. If you have open cuts or sores, keep them as clean as possible by washing well with soap and clean, safe water to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.

When providing first aid for a wound, [clean hands](#)(<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/sanitation.asp>) can help prevent infection (see [Handwashing](#) on this page).

Visit [Emergency Wound Care After a Natural Disaster](#)(<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/woundcare.asp>) to find complete information on caring for wounds. Healthcare professionals should visit [Emergency Wound Management for Healthcare Professionals](#)(<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/emergwoundhcp.asp>) and [Management of Vibrio vulnificus Wound Infections After a Disaster](#)(<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/disease/vibrio faq.asp>).