

## World Hand Hygiene Day

On May 5, at the initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO), World Hand Hygiene Day is celebrated. The date was not chosen by chance: 05.05 symbolizes the five fingers on each human hand.

Under the motto "Clean hands save lives!", the focus is on safety, especially in the medical environment, but this is relevant for everyone.

In recent years, outbreaks of infectious diseases have been registered worldwide; therefore, the importance of personal hygiene, particularly hand washing, has become a primary preventive measure. Despite this, for many people, hand washing has not yet become a habit.

### Why wash your hands?

Hand washing is an effective hygienic procedure that prevents the spread of pathogens of various diseases. Numerous infectious diseases can be transmitted through dirty hands, some of which can be quite severe and require special treatment. These include: intestinal infections (e.g., salmonellosis, cholera, dysentery, hepatitis A, enterovirus infection, rotavirus infection, and many others), airborne infections (acute respiratory infections, influenza, coronavirus infection), parasitic infestations (enterobiasis, ascariasis, giardiasis, etc.), and contagious skin and fungal diseases. The transmission of pathogens occurs both directly and indirectly through household items, various surfaces, and toys.

### When should you wash your hands?

You must wash your hands:

- Before eating;
- Before preparing food;
- After using the toilet;
- After using public transport and visiting stores;
- After handling money;
- Upon returning home;
- After cleaning the apartment;
- After contact with animals and their waste;
- After sneezing, coughing (while covering your mouth with your hand), or blowing your nose;
- Before and after treating wounds, or performing medical and hygienic procedures (e.g., before massaging a child, or after changing a diaper), or providing care to a sick relative;
- Before inserting contact lenses or dental prostheses;
- After contact with waste;
- When hands are visibly dirty.

## How to wash your hands properly?

To wash your hands thoroughly, first remove any jewelry: rings, watches, bracelets, and roll up your sleeves. When soaping your hands, pay special attention to the fingertips, the spaces between the fingers, and the area under the nails – these are the places where microbes accumulate most. Don't forget your wrists. Rub thoroughly, then rinse with water and lather again – re-lathering helps remove microbes from the pores that open during the hand washing process. Pay attention to your dominant hand – it is typically washed less thoroughly.

WHO and other health authorities recommend washing hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, and 30-60 seconds for maximum effectiveness.

## What should you wash your hands with?

Do not use water that is too hot. Although intuitively it may seem that hot water removes germs better, this is not true. Hot water washes away the natural oil layer, which dries out the skin of your hands and opens the door for bacteria. Wash your hands with comfortably warm water.

Avoid using antibacterial soap for hand washing – it kills not only harmful bacteria but also the beneficial bacteria that constantly reside on the skin of your hands. For daily hand washing, regular toilet soap is sufficient. Preference should be given to liquid soap. If using bar soap, make sure it is kept in a dry soap dish.

Dry your hands with a clean, fresh towel. Ideally, adults and children should have separate hand towels. Towels should be changed every day.

And remember: hand hygiene is not just a recommendation to be ignored. It is a necessity.

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