

## Hygiene Best Practices

### What is hygiene?

Hygiene is defined as a practice to help maintain personal health and prevent the spread of pathogens and disease. There are many different methods and steps involved in practicing good hygiene, including hand, respiratory, and environmental hygiene. Proper hygiene is especially essential to keep in mind during a pandemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) outlines protective measures for the current pandemic in the article [Advice for the Public](#).

### Hand hygiene: washing and sanitizer

Hand hygiene is critical for disease prevention. Handwashing primarily relies on mechanical movements and friction to help remove debris. WHO recommends thorough scrubbing with soap and water, as demonstrated in [this infographic](#).



#### The steps for proper handwashing include:

1. Wet hands with clean running water.
2. Apply enough soap to evenly distribute on both hands and lather.
3. Scrub hands for a minimum of 20 seconds.
4. Rinse hands thoroughly under clean running water.
5. Dry hands thoroughly.

When clean running water and soap are unavailable, **hand sanitizer** is a suitable alternative. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends alcohol-based hand sanitizers composed of at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol. Proper technique for hand sanitizer is similar to handwashing. An adequate amount of sanitizer to cover all hand surfaces should be distributed and then rubbed in for at least 20 seconds, or until dried.

**Tip: Wash or sanitize your hands regularly**, especially before eating or touching your face. Washing hands with warm water and soap **for at least 20 seconds** is the best option. Alternatively, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, which kills most microbes.

## Respiratory hygiene: cough etiquette and respiratory droplets

Respiratory hygiene involves adhering to proper cough etiquette and being mindful of respiratory droplets. Sneezing and coughing increase the distance to which respiratory droplets spread. Using disposable tissues is the preferred way to cover a cough or sneeze. Remember to dispose of your tissue and clean your hands afterward.

When tissues are not available, cough into your elbow, not your hands, to prevent the spread of droplets. Remember to follow up these events by disposing of your tissue, and cleaning your hands afterward.

In the event that someone is experiencing respiratory distress, they may be sneezing and coughing more than usual. Wearing a surgical mask helps to prevent the spread of respiratory droplets, and is among the CDC's standard recommendations for individuals presenting with respiratory symptoms.

**Tip: Follow good respiratory hygiene.** When you cough or sneeze, be sure to cover your nose and mouth with your bent elbow or a disposable tissue. If you use a tissue, immediately throw it into the garbage and wash your hands. This includes **refraining from touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** as much as possible.



## Environmental hygiene: disinfecting and social distancing

The CDC has developed a guide, [Clean & Disinfect](#), to help provide clarity of household hygiene during the current situation. Routine cleaning during this time is a great place to start as disinfecting surfaces and objects that are touched frequently is essential to preventing the spread of pathogens. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) guide for the current pandemic, [Control and Prevention](#), further expands on workplace cleanliness and safety in relation to infectious disease.

**Tip: Clean areas and objects more frequently**, during times in which there is an infectious disease outbreak. Use **antibacterial soap or disinfecting wipes**, this helps to remove any lingering pathogens from commonly used items.

## Social distancing

Social distancing is currently one of the key measures recommended by public health authorities to limit the spread of pathogens. Social distancing can be defined as maintaining a reasonable distance between individuals (e.g., two to six feet) as a means to decrease the risk of spreading pathogens. During pandemics, social distancing guidelines become more rigorous. Working from home, self-quarantine, and non-essential business closures are all part of the effort to decrease rates of transmission. Respecting the guidelines that have been given by official organizations such as the WHO is essential to reducing the impact of infectious disease.

**Tip: Maintain physical distance.** Keep a distance of **at least three feet (one meter)** between yourself and other individuals as much as possible. Unless you require urgent medical attention, stay home when you're sick to facilitate rest and healing, as well as decrease the risk of transmission to others.

## Hygiene is crucial in preventing pathogen spread.

One of the most important actions individuals can take to minimize the spread of pathogens is to follow these hygiene best practices. **Staying informed about the current situation**, and obtaining information from credible sources, such as your healthcare provider and public health authorities, can help you keep up to date on the latest developments.