

# Infection Control: Advice for Patients

## Wash Hands Correctly! ...

A quick splash of soap and water isn't enough. Five simple steps improve hand washing and infection control:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap. Don't use a basin of standing water. Turning off the tap helps to conserve clean water.
- Lather all parts of your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and particularly under your nails.
- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. This is the time it takes to hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water. If the water does not automatically shut off, there is no clear data supporting use of a paper towel to shut off the tap, and using the rinsed hands to turn off the tap reduces paper waste.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them. Germs can be transferred more easily to and from wet hands, so drying hands after washing is advisable for further protection.

## ... Or Use Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizers

Soap and water are the preferred method to clean hands, because washing removes many pathogens and toxic substances. When washing with soap and running water isn't feasible, alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be helpful with the following caveats<sup>7</sup>:

- Select a product with at least 60% alcohol.
- Apply the product to the palm of one hand. Use the amount recommended on the product label.
- Rub the product all over the surfaces of your hands. Just as with soap and water, all surfaces including under the nails need decontamination.
- Continue to rub the product into hand surfaces until hands are dry. Wiping sanitizer off before it dries will reduce effectiveness.

## Masks are Not Routinely Advised

Routinely wearing a mask while out in public is unlikely to be helpful for a healthy person. In addition, masks have to be changed every 20 minutes or so, or they become moist and ineffective when worn through the day. Masks should instead be reserved to be worn by people with symptoms to decrease the risk of transmission to others.