

# Hand Washing in Emergency Situations

*Courtney J. Schoessow, Extension Program Specialist—Health  
The Texas A&M University System*

After an emergency such as a hurricane or flood, it is possible that your water supplies have been temporarily cut off or have become contaminated. However, it is still important for you and your family to wash your hands often to avoid illness.

## When should you wash your hands?

- ◆ Before preparing or eating food
- ◆ After using the bathroom
- ◆ After changing diapers or cleaning a child who has gone to the bathroom
- ◆ Before and after tending to someone who is sick
- ◆ After handling uncooked foods, particularly raw meat, poultry or fish
- ◆ After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- ◆ After handling an animal or animal waste
- ◆ After handling garbage
- ◆ Before and after treating a cut or wound
- ◆ When your hands are visibly dirty

## Using disinfected water

- ◆ If disinfected water is available, follow these steps for hand washing:
- ◆ Place your hands together under the water (warm water if possible).
- ◆ Rub your hands together for at least 15 to 20 seconds, with soap if possible. Wash all the surfaces well, including your wrists, palms, fingers, the backs of your hands and under the fingernails.
- ◆ Clean the dirt from under your fingernails.
- ◆ Rinse the soap from your hands.
- ◆ Dry your hands completely with a clean towel if possible (this helps remove germs). However, if no towels are available, you may air dry your hands.
- ◆ To avoid chapping and cracking of your skin, pat it dry rather than rubbing it.
- ◆ If you use a disposable towel, throw it in the trash.

## Using alcohol-based products

If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based product to clean your hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs can quickly reduce the number of

germs on your skin. Remember: Products vary in the amount of the hand rub needed to reduce the number of bacteria on your hands. Read the product details on the back of the container for directions on how much to use.

**When using an alcohol-based hand rub:**

- ♦ Apply the product to the palm of one hand.
- ♦ Rub your hands together, making sure that all surfaces of your hands and fingers are covered with the hand rub, until they are dry.

This information was excerpted and adapted from Hand Hygiene in Emergency Situations, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.  
*<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/pdf/handhygienefacts.pdf>*

Produced by AgriLife Communications and Marketing, The Texas A&M System  
Extension publications can be found on the Web at: <http://AgriLifebookstore.org>

Visit the Texas AgriLife Extension Service at <http://AgriLifeextension.tamu.edu>

Educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward G. Smith, Director, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The Texas A&M System.