

Hand Care: How to protect your hands

With the COVID-19 outbreak, we are encouraged to wash our hands more frequently than ever before. Handwashing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the transmission of infections. Unfortunately, the way we wash our hands will also break down the barrier we are trying to protect. If our hands become cracked and sore then they are no longer considered 'clean'. Below are some tips to help keep your hands free from dry, cracked skin.

1. Wet hands before applying soap

Applying soap on dry hands will cause skin to become dry.

2. Use a moisturising soap

Where possible, use a soap with a creamy consistency with ingredients such as glycerine and lanolin. Avoid bar soaps. Bar soaps usually have a higher pH which can cause dryness. Hand sanitisers have a high percentage of alcohol so it dries quickly and is effective in killing most germs. A good hand sanitiser has a moisturiser in it such as aloe vera. **DO NOT** use a straight alcohol sanitiser.

3. Wash hands with lukewarm water

Avoid using hot water. Hot water strips your hands of any natural oils that it needs to stay waterproof.

4. Don't scrub your hands too vigorously

This is usually because we are in a rush. Try not to aggravate your skin. This applies when using hand sanitiser as well.

5. Pat dry with paper towel

Avoid rubbing skin with towel/paper towel.

6. Use hand cream

When water isn't sealed into the skin after washing, it can dry out your hand. The reason is that water acts like a magnet and it will attract water out from the deepest layers of the skin and evaporate into the dry air. The result is even tighter, drier skin. To prevent this from happening, be sure to immediately apply hand cream afterward. Moisturisers help with skin care because they:

- restore the barrier function of the epidermis
- provide a protective film
- fill in the small crevices between scales
- increase the water content of the epidermis
- soothe the skin
- improve the skin's appearance and texture.

By Sharon Henderson, Student Health Officer