

# Coronavirus: Advice on hand-washing and the use of gloves

This advice is aimed at the general public and is not applicable to healthcare settings.

COVID-19 is spread from person to person through respiratory droplets, which are small drops that come out of the nose or mouth when a person who is sick with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes. These droplets can remain on objects or surfaces around an infected person or which an infected person has touched. You can get infected with COVID-19 if you touch these objects or surfaces and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth, or if you inhale infected respiratory droplets by spending time within two metres of an infected person. Therefore handwashing is an important precaution you can take to avoid getting infected and prevent the virus from spreading.

This leaflet explains how and when you should wash your hands to help prevent Coronavirus infection and gives advice regarding the use of gloves.

## When should I wash my hands?

You should wash your hands frequently, including:

- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After touching surfaces outside the home, especially frequently touched surfaces in public spaces (e.g. hand rails, door knobs, lift buttons, switches etc.)
- After visiting public spaces or using public transport
- Before, during and after caring for a sick person
- Before, during and after preparing food
- Before eating
- After using the toilet, changing a nappy or helping a child to use the toilet
- After touching animals and pets
- After handling garbage
- When you can see that your hands are dirty
- Before putting on your mask
- Before and after removing your mask

## What should I use to wash my hands?

If your hands are visibly dirty, then use soap and water. If your hands don't look dirty, you can use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub (minimum 70% alcohol concentration) to wash your hands. **They are both equally effective.**

## How should I wash my hands?

You should rub your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds. If you are using soap and water, you should see a lather (bubbles forming). Follow the steps in the diagram below to ensure that you clean all areas of your hands. It is best to keep nails short as it is very hard

to reach the underside of long nails to clean them thoroughly.



### **Why should I avoid touching my eyes, nose and mouth?**

Hands touch many surfaces. Your hands may touch a surface or an object contaminated with Coronavirus and pick up the virus from that surface or object. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

### **Should I wear gloves when I go out?**

There is no need to wear gloves when you go out. In fact, the World Health Organization does NOT recommend this as a preventive measure against Coronavirus. Regularly washing your bare hands offers more protection against COVID-19 than wearing gloves. Gloves can pick up contamination with COVID-19. If you then touch your face with contaminated gloves, you can get infected.

### **5 reasons why it is NOT a good idea to wear gloves as protection against COVID-19 during your daily activities:**

1. If you sneeze or cough into the gloves, this creates a new surface for the virus to live on. The virus may also get onto the gloves if you touch a contaminated surface.
2. The virus can survive for longer periods of time on the surface of the gloves than it can on your bare hands and may accumulate on them. Therefore, if your gloves become contaminated with the virus and you touch a clean surface, you will contaminate it and increase the spread of the virus. This explains why it is important to change gloves frequently.

3. Wearing gloves can give you a false sense of security and you may not wash your hands as often as you should. This makes it more likely that you touch your face with contaminated gloves and risk getting infected.
4. There is also a risk of getting contaminated while removing the gloves, especially if you do not remove them using the correct technique.
5. Lastly, unnecessary use of gloves by the public may lead to glove shortages for healthcare workers who genuinely need them to enable them to safely deal with suspected or known cases of Coronavirus.

**Are there any specific situations in which members of the public are advised to wear gloves?**

You are advised to wear disposable gloves if you are caring for someone who is known or suspected to have Coronavirus.

If you work in an environment where you are touching surfaces or items frequently touched by others you may consider wearing disposable gloves. For example, if you work in a supermarket or a petrol station.

If you decide to use gloves, you should wear them when you are in contact with frequently touched surfaces such as supermarket fridge handles, door knobs, trolley handles and POS keypads, or when handling money from a customer. You should remove your gloves and throw them away after each use, for example, after handling money from one customer or after opening a door or handling a trolley. Once you remove the gloves, wash your hands. You are now ready to touch a clean surface (such as your phone, biro or the cash register). If you keep your gloves on when you touch these clean items, you could contaminate them. If you find it difficult to change your gloves every time in these situations, it is better to wash your hands using hand sanitiser or soap and water instead of wearing gloves.

The use of gloves does not replace the need for frequent hand-washing. Those making use of gloves are advised to follow the recommendations below so as to use gloves safely.

**DOs for glove use:**

- DO continue to wash your hands regularly
- DO cover any cuts or scrapes on your hands with a dressing or plaster before putting on gloves
- DO change your gloves regularly, after each customer or encounter
- DO be cautious when removing the gloves (see our advice below)
- DO dispose of used gloves safely into a waste container
- DO wash your hands thoroughly after taking off your gloves
- DO replace gloves that develop a hole or a tear. Remove them safely, wash your hands and put on a fresh pair

**DON'Ts for glove use:**

- DON'T wear the same pair of gloves for long periods of time. Gloves should be changed frequently after each customer or encounter in a retail situation
- DON'T touch your face while wearing gloves
- DON'T use gloves as a substitute for hand-washing. You still need to wash your bare hands regularly.
- DON'T reuse the same pair of gloves. Once you've taken them off, you should never put them back on again, not even if you wash them.

- DON'T leave used gloves lying around. This could help spread the virus.

### **How should I safely remove a pair of disposable gloves?**

When removing gloves, the principle that you should keep in mind is that you should not touch the external surface of the gloves (which may be contaminated) with your bare hands. To achieve this, you can use this technique:

- Pinch one glove at the wrist without touching your skin and peel it away from your hand (Step 1), turning the glove inside out. Hold the glove you've just removed in the hand that is still gloved (Step 2).
- Hook the index and middle finger of the bare hand inside the remaining glove, being careful not to touch the outside surface of the glove (Step 3). Pull off the glove, turning it inside out with the first glove inside (Step 4).
- Throw the gloves into the bin (Step 5).
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol hand rub (Step 6)