



Should I wash my hands with soap & water or use hand sanitizer?

CDC recommends washing hands with soap and water whenever possible. Washing with soap and water cleans off dirt, germs, and debris. Soap helps kill germs. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. 60% alcohol kills germs on your hands, but it may not remove grime and dirt.

Care should be taken with alcohol-based hand sanitizers: Swallowing alcohol-based hand sanitizers can cause alcohol poisoning. Why? Ethyl alcohol (ethanol)-based hand sanitizers are safe when used as directed, but they can cause alcohol poisoning if a person swallows more than a couple of mouthfuls. The alcohol in hand sanitizer is not drinking alcohol and other ingredients can also cause harm.

Children may be particularly likely to swallow hand sanitizers that are scented, brightly colored, or attractively packaged. Hand sanitizers should be stored out of the reach of young children and should be used with adult supervision. Child-resistant caps could also help reduce hand sanitizer-related poisonings among young children. Older children and adults might purposefully swallow hand sanitizers trying to get drunk, but it can cause severe low blood sugar, liver damage, and other health problems. Alcohol in hand sanitizer can catch fire easily.

