

How to prevent illness by washing your hands



Canada 67 Mowat Avenue, Suite 036 Toronto, Ontario M6K 3E3 (416) 652-0137
USA 1623 Military Road, #279 a Niagara Falls, New York 14304-174 5 (716) 754-4883
New Zealand 206 Papanui Road Christchurch 5

www.iamat.org | info@iamat.org

Thanks to Jason Tetro, microbiologist and
'Germ Guy' for reviewing this tipsheet.
<https://germguy.wordpress.com/posts>

If you get sick abroad your travel plans and finances will undoubtedly take a hit. Trip itinerary changes, re-booking fees, and unexpected medical costs can add up, not to mention unnecessary stress. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Sometimes it's easy to forget or ignore health considerations that we take for granted back home. Fortunately, many travel-related illnesses can be prevented by following simple hygiene practices.

The power is in your hands!

We can't stress this enough. There are three reasons why you should wash your hands regularly and thoroughly during travel (and at home too).

1. Our hands carry thousands of microorganisms such as viruses and bacteria. Many are harmless but some are responsible for illnesses like the common cold, influenza, Traveller's Diarrhea, Hepatitis A, and Meningitis. Since we touch our face hundreds of times a day – often unconsciously – unwanted germs enter our body through our eyes, mouth, and nose to attack our immune system.
2. Everyday we come into contact with surfaces or food contaminated by someone who hasn't washed their hands properly. For example, un-wanted germs hitch a ride on our hands when we exchange currency, touch railings, use automated bank machines, eat improperly handled or undercooked food, as well as with poor body and toilet hygiene.
3. Washing hands is proven to save lives. Not only are you protecting your health, you have the power to break the cycle and prevent others from getting sick. Proper hand washing reduces the chance of children, the elderly, and persons with chronic health conditions or compromised immune systems from developing health complications.

Sometimes it's easy to forget or ignore health considerations that we take for granted back home. Fortunately, many travel-related illnesses can be prevented by following simple hygiene practices.



Photo by Samad Delda, Pexels.com

Protect yourself and others

Here's a reminder of when and how to wash your hands properly.

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water (cold water is fine too if there's no warm water available), singing 'Happy Birthday' twice. See proper hand washing technique diagram below.
- No access to soap and water? Carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Wash your hands every time they are dirty; before preparing or eating food, after using the toilet or changing a diaper; before dealing with cuts, scrapes, or wounds; after petting animals; and after handling garbage or compost.
- Keep your hands away from your face, mouth, nose, and eyes.
- Do the sleeve sneeze if you don't have a tissue or handkerchief. If you use a tissue, dispose of it immediately.

A note on mind and body

Managing travel stress by exercising (even just stretching or walking) and getting the right amount of sleep will also help you stay healthy. Practicing good hygiene leads to being comfortable and feeling good about yourself. Since you may not find all the hygienic amenities you need during your trip, consider packing these items:

- Mints, gum, or mouthwash.
- Facial cleansers.
- No rinse body soap, castile liquid soap, or hand sanitizer.
- Extra tissue, toilet paper, and wet wipes available in travel packs.
- Feminine hygiene products.
- Condoms to protect against sexually transmitted infections.
- A basic First Aid kit. 



Image source: World Health Organization, www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en