

13 Handwashing in epidemics

OVERVIEW



In some epidemics, you can get sick when you are trying to help people if you are not careful (see *Action tool 20* on volunteer protection).

Handwashing is a major factor in protecting yourself when dealing with Ebola and Marburg epidemics, among others. This method of handwashing should be used whenever you are helping with an epidemic.

Why is it important and what is different about handwashing in epidemics?

- ➔ Ebola and Marburg germs are very easily transmitted through bodily fluids and can even be transmitted by the bodies of people who die from the disease.
- ➔ Very vigorous handwashing is needed in such cases. This will be more comprehensive than the usual handwashing.
- ➔ The most important aspect of working in such epidemics is to use all available protection (see *Action tools 20 and 21* on volunteer protection and using personal protection equipment).
- ➔ To handwash during an epidemic and eliminate all germs that can be on your hands, you need to:
 - Use either soap or alcohol-based disinfectant
 - Wash your hands as usual
 - Then wash thoroughly between your fingers
 - Scrub the tips of the fingers of the two hands together
 - Wash each of your thumbs with the other hand
 - Scrub the tips of the fingers of each hand on the palm of the other hand
 (See illustrations on the other side of this sheet.)
- ➔ It is a good idea to wash your hands using this method every time you have touched something that can give you germs when working in an epidemic, not only of Ebola and Marburg but also of other diseases such as diarrhoea.

Use community message(s): 10

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How to wash your hands properly during an epidemic

