



# 35. Handwashing in a highly infectious epidemic

Last update: 2023-04-03

## Overview

- Handwashing is a vital source of protection in epidemics of highly infectious diseases such as Ebola, Marburg fever, Lassa fever, plague, MERS and monkeypox. It is possible to become exposed to these diseases and to fall sick when trying to help people. Highly infectious germs are spread very easily through body fluids and certain diseases can even be transmitted via the bodies of people who are dead.
- Very vigorous and comprehensive handwashing is needed to protect yourself. (See Action Tools: [Volunteer protection and safety](#); and [Personal protective equipment \(PPE\) for highly infectious diseases](#))

## What to do and how to do it

### *When to wash hands in a highly infectious situation*

Hands should be washed with soap and/or disinfectant:

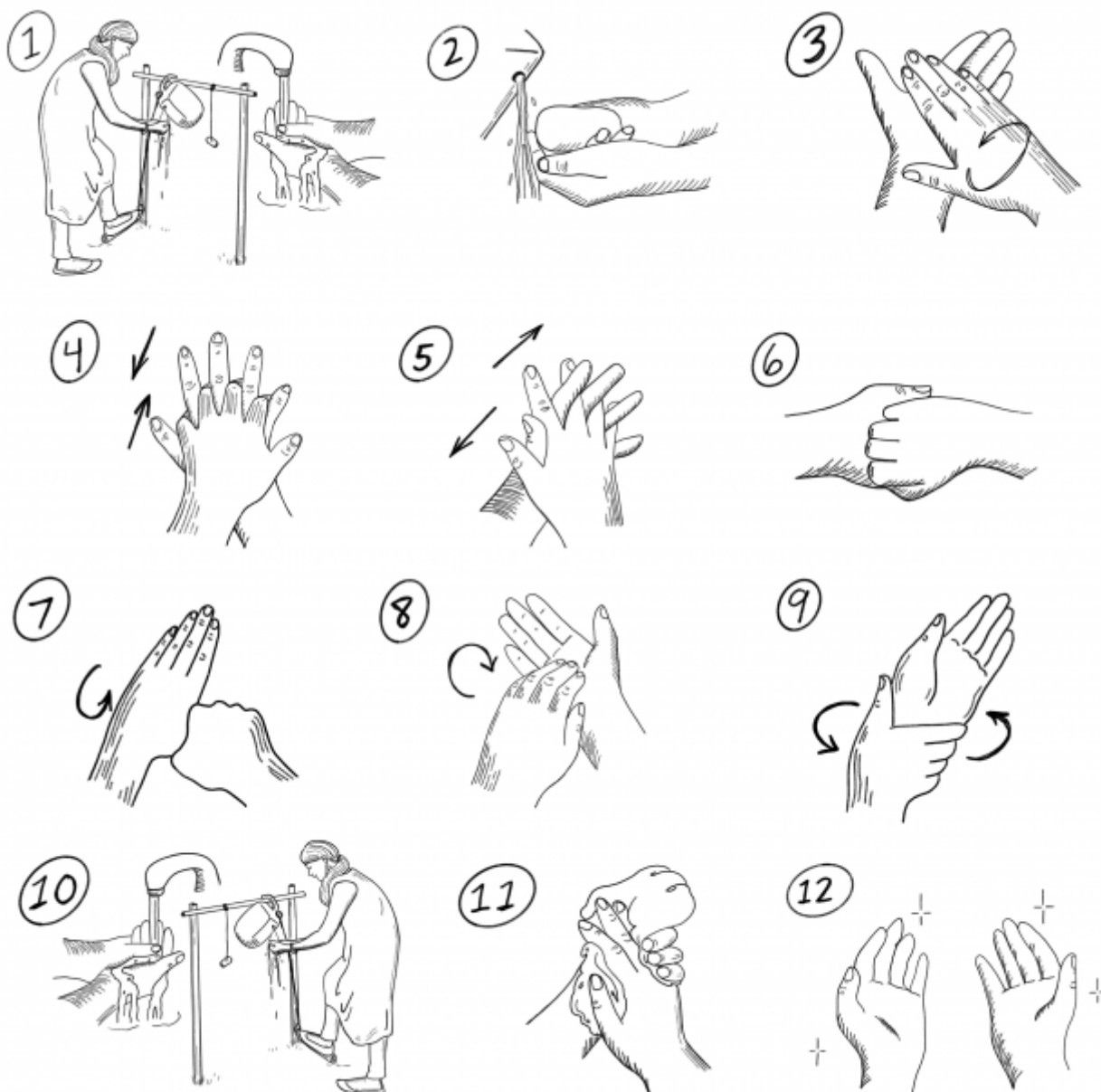
- BEFORE: preparing food, eating, feeding a child, breastfeeding, caring for someone who is ill, treating a wound (yours or someone else's)
- AFTER: using the toilet or cleaning a baby; touching garbage or waste; touching or feeding animals; handling raw meat; blowing nose, coughing or sneezing; treating wounds or caring for sick people; coming into contact with a sick person in an epidemic
- IN ADDITION: During an epidemic (of a highly infectious disease, or another disease such as diarrhoea or cholera, or a respiratory infection), it is a good idea to use this handwashing method every time you have touched something that can pass on an infection.

### *How to wash hands in highly infectious epidemics*

When working in highly infectious epidemics, it is critical to use all available forms of protection. One of these is handwashing. To wash hands correctly during a highly infectious epidemic, you must:

- Use soap or an 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.



## Community messages



10. Steps for washing hands in epidemics