



Care Sheet

Hand Sanitisers & other chemicals in Aquariums

Good hygiene is very important when working with fish, yet this is often overlooked. Good hygiene practices will prevent any chance of contracting bacterial infections or zoonotic disease from working with fish and aquariums, especially if you have cuts or abrasions. Retail staff and hobbyists alike should wash their hands after activities such as:

- Handling sick or dead fish.
- Handling equipment contaminated by sick or dead fish.
- Handling fish foods

In general, washing your hands with ordinary soap and warm water will be sufficient to prevent any chance of infection. Normal soaps generally do not have overly toxic compounds in them. However, rinsing your hands thoroughly after washing will reduce any residues to levels that will not harm fish and ensure the safety for the fish.

If you are concerned about the potential for bacterial infection, then antibacterial hand wash, soaps and gels can be used. These are specifically designed for reducing bacterial numbers on the skin and are also useful in helping to remove smells from the skin. These products contain different chemicals in them including ethanol, iodine and disinfectants which can all be toxic to fish in high enough concentrations.

Therefore, any residue left on hands could be a source of contamination or affect the fish in your tank, and it should be a standard practice to rinse your hands with water to remove any residues before putting your hands back into an aquarium.

It should also be noted that moisturisers, perfumes etc can also contain chemicals that are potentially harmful for fish. It is recommended that these be avoided. If you do use these products you should wash your hands and remove excess from your hands before putting them into the aquarium.

In terms of cleaning aquariums, most cleaners, disinfectants etc should be avoided unless you are trying to disinfect the aquarium. If any chemicals are used to disinfect equipment or the aquarium, ensure all equipment is well rinsed of any residue before refilling and placing fish into the tank. It should also be noted that these chemicals will kill nitrifying bacteria and that a tank that has been disinfected will have to be treated as a new aquarium and gradually cycled to start biological filtration.

Take care too with chemicals used around the area of the aquarium. Avoid the use of fly and insect sprays, hairspray etc, as these may drift toward the aquarium, and are generally toxic to fish.