



Germ Proof Your Kids

HAND HYGIENE

REDUCE THE NUMBER OF INFECTIONS YOUR KIDS GET EACH YEAR

It's no secret that kids share everything, including germs. Hand washing is the single most effective strategy in reducing the spread of infections. From the bathroom to the classroom, from the kitchen to the playground, hand washing protects kids of all ages – and even saves lives.

How to wash (and dry):

Kids typically spend less than 5 seconds washing and leave the sink with their hands dripping wet. A 20-30 second wash and thorough drying will reduce the germ load by as much as a 1000-fold. Teach your kids to wash until they finish singing “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” or the “ABCs”; this makes your job easy because both songs have the same tune and last exactly 20 seconds each.

Use lots of water and lots of rubbing with soap to create a good lather – include the wrists, between the fingers, and around the nails – followed by lots of water again. How kids dry their hands is also important; the drier the hands, the fewer the leftover germs. Use clean towels (paper or cloth) and thorough rubbing; electric dryers aren't as effective in germ reduction.

What to wash with:

Simple soap doesn't kill germs; it cleans hands mechanically, lifting and washing away dirt and organic material that contain germs. But, simple soap works. Studies in day care and schools show that the rates of diarrhea, vomiting illnesses, respiratory infections, and absent days are reduced dramatically by simple soap and water washes.

Products that kill germs include alcohol-containing “hand sanitizers”, and antibiotic-containing “antibacterial” soaps. Alcohol kills many germs on contact, and has been incorporated into “rubs”, rinses, foams and gels that don't require water, making them ideal for your purse and the glove box in the car. These are safe products, but will sting if used on cuts or scrapes.

Liquid soap in a dispenser is less likely than bar soap to become contaminated with the very germs we're trying to protect kids from.

When to wash:

Germs get on kids' hands from contact with other people, animals, and inanimate objects. The kids then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth and the germ invades and causes infection. Good luck teaching kids not to put their hands in their own or each other's eyes, noses, or mouths, so strategically timed hand washing is the next best option. Here are the 10 most important times to wash:

1. After playing with a sick friend or sibling (or after handling things that a sick child might have handled – like in the doctor's waiting room).
2. After using the bathroom (use the hand towel to turn off the sink and open the bathroom door).
3. Before eating.
4. After high-fiving the opposing team at the end of a sports competition (or any other mass-handshaking event like the receiving line at a wedding or graduation).
5. After recess.
6. After school or day care.
7. After playing with animals or in areas where animals hang out.
8. After playing outside.
9. After blowing your nose, or coughing into your hands. Although your kids cannot "give themselves an infection" by contact with their own secretions, this is a very considerate gesture that protects other kids from the germs on your kids' hands.
10. Before bedtime.

Many studies have proven that effective strategies for hand washing, like those mentioned above, will keep your kids healthier – fewer respiratory infections and fewer gastrointestinal infections. Your kids will miss less school and day care, and you'll miss less work.