

HANDWASHING

General information

Hands are warm, moist parts of the body that come into frequent contact with germs. Young children have not yet learned healthy personal habits and may suck their fingers and/or thumbs, put things in their mouths, or rub their eyes. These habits can spread disease, but good handwashing can help reduce infection due to these habits. Caregivers who teach and model good handwashing techniques can reduce illness in childcares, schools, and the community.

Handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infections.

Included in Section 3 are instructions on when to wash hands and pictures to demonstrate how to do the correct handwashing procedure. Remember that gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.

Childcare and school staff information

- Learn why, how, and when to correctly wash hands.
- Follow a procedure that ensures safety for the infant or child.
- Teach young children to wash hands and supervise them as they do.
- Encourage children to wash hands.
- Use visual reminders and cues to action (e.g., posters, stickers) to help staff and children remember to wash hands.
- Teach parents about the importance of handwashing so they can reinforce good hand hygiene with their children.
- Provide ongoing staff education about handwashing.

Recommendations for when children and childcare providers should wash hands

Children and Childcare Providers

- After arriving and before leaving.
- Before and after eating.
- After using the toilet and after diapering.
- Before and after using water tables, play dough, or sensory materials.
- After using the playground, gym, or muscle room.
- After contact with pets.
- Whenever hands are visibly dirty.

Childcare Providers should additionally wash hands

- After contact with bodily fluids.
- After contact with pet cages and other pet products.
- Before and after applying medication or ointment.
- Before and after dispensing oral medications.
- After assisting with toileting.
- Prior to assisting children at mealtimes.

Recommendations for hand hygiene products

- Liquid soap

Liquid soap is **recommended** in childcare settings and schools since used bar soap can harbor bacteria. Regular liquid soap is effective in removing soil and germs. Remember that soap and water are necessary if hands are visibly soiled. When using liquid soap dispensers, avoid

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touching the tip of the squirt spout with hands. If the liquid soap container is refillable, the container and pump should be emptied, cleaned, and dried completely before being refilled.

- **Antimicrobial soaps**

Antimicrobial soaps are **not recommended** by the American Medical Association and the CDC. Many scientists are concerned that use of these soaps could lead to strains of resistant bacteria and these soaps may actually do more harm than good. Another disadvantage is that antimicrobial soaps must be left on the hands for about two minutes in order to have an effect on bacteria.

- **Alcohol-based hand rubs** (if soap and running water are not available)

When soap and running water are not readily available, for example on a field trip, an alcohol-based hand rub can be used. The alcohol-based hand rub must be applied vigorously over all hand surfaces. **If hands were visibly soiled, hands must be washed with soap and warm running water as soon as it is available, because alcohol-based hand rubs are not effective in the presence of dirt and soil.** Using a common water basin in these situations is not advised, as the water can become contaminated very quickly.

Alcohol-based hand rubs are 60% to 95% alcohol (usually 70%). Read the label and follow manufacturer's instructions. As with any product, they should be safely stored out of reach of children. Closely supervise children who are using an alcohol-based hand rub.

Advantages of alcohol-based hand rubs:

- Act quickly to kill germs on hands.
- More accessible than sinks.
- Reduce bacterial counts on hands.
- Do not promote bacterial resistance.

Disadvantage of alcohol-based hand rubs:

- Ineffective in the presence of dirt, soil, or food.

Procedure for cleaning hands with alcohol-based hand rubs

Use enough alcohol-based hand rub to cover all surfaces of the hands and fingers (about a dime sized amount).

1. Apply alcohol-based hand rub to palm of one hand.
2. Rub hands together covering all surfaces of hands and fingers.
3. Rub until hand rub is absorbed and hands and fingers are dry (generally about 15 seconds).

Towels

Use single-use paper towels to dry hands or use hand dryers. Do not use multi-use towels such as hand towels, kitchen towels, or dish cloths.



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Fingernail care for staff and children

- Keep fingernails short and clean.
 - Avoid biting or chewing nails.
 - Staff should moisten cuticles to avoid hangnails.
 - Avoid ripping or biting a hangnail. Instead, clip it with a clean, sanitized nail trimmer.
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- Clear fingernail polish that is well maintained may be worn; avoid colored nail polish since it is difficult to see dirt under nails. **Staff members who handle food should not wear nail polish of any kind.** Chipped fingernail polish may contaminate food and may harbor bacteria.
 - Artificial nails are **highly discouraged** from use since they are known to harbor germs even with good handwashing techniques. They can break off into food and have been implicated in disease outbreaks in hospital nurseries. **Staff members who handle food are prohibited from wearing artificial nails.**
 - Use fingernail brushes to remove dirt and stool from under nails. Use the nailbrush after diapering or assisting with toilet activities, before and after food preparation, and whenever nails are soiled.

Ways for staff to keep hands healthy

- Cover open cuts and abrasions less than 24 hours old with a dressing (e.g., a bandage).
- Use warm water, not extremely hot or cold, and just enough soap to get a good lather.
- Rinse and dry hands completely.
- Use a soap product that is least drying to hands.
- Use hand lotion regularly to keep skin moist. Use products with a squirt spout so hands do not have contact with the container.
- Wear gloves outside in cold weather.
- Wear utility gloves for direct hand contact with harsh cleaners or chemicals.
- Wear work gloves when doing yard work, gardening, etc .

Resources for teaching and promoting handwashing practices

These online resources are provided by the Minnesota Department of Health. They have useful materials and information for setting up handwashing programs in childcare facilities that teach children how to properly wash their hands as well as encourage frequent handwashing with proper technique.

Posters: www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/materials.html

Handwashing Toolkit: www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/curricula/toolkit.html

Project Ideas: www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/curricula/projectideas.html

