



Why Is Hand Washing So Important?

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A delicious mud pie, a good-luck rock, or a friendly frog are the types of goodies kids love to bring home. But these adorable gifts can also bring millions of germs with them.

Kids don't always listen when you tell them to wash their hands before eating, after using the bathroom, or when they come inside from playing. But it's a message worth repeating — hand washing is by far the best way to prevent germs from spreading and to keep your kids from getting sick.

First Line of Defense Against Germs: Good hand washing is the first line of defense against the spread of many illnesses, from the common cold to more serious illnesses such as meningitis, bronchiolitis, influenza, hepatitis A, and most types of infectious diarrhea.

Germs can be transmitted many ways, including:

- ▶ touching dirty hands
- ▶ changing dirty diapers
- ▶ through contaminated water and food
- ▶ through droplets released during a cough or a sneeze

- ▶ via contaminated surfaces
- ▶ through contact with a sick person's body fluids

When kids come into contact with germs, they can unknowingly become infected simply by touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. And once they're infected, it's usually just a matter of time before the whole family comes down with the same illness.

Washing Hands Correctly

Here's how to scrub those germs away. Demonstrate this routine to your kids — or better yet, wash your hands together often so they learn how important this good habit is:

1. Wash your hands in warm water. Make sure the water isn't too hot for little hands.
2. Use soap and lather up for about 20 seconds (antibacterial soap isn't necessary — any soap will do). Make sure you get in between the fingers and under the nails where uninvited germs like to hang out. And don't forget the wrists!
3. Rinse and dry well with a clean towel.

To minimize the germs passed around your family, make frequent hand washing a rule for everyone, especially:

- before eating and cooking
- after using the bathroom
- after cleaning around the house
- after touching animals, including family pets
- before and after visiting or taking care of any sick friends or relatives
- after blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing
- after being outside (playing, gardening, walking the dog, etc.)

If soap and water are not available, use gel hand sanitizers or alcohol-based hand wipes containing 60% to 90% ethyl alcohol or isopropanol. Carry one or both with you when you travel, and keep them in your car or purse.

If using the gel sanitizer, rub your hands until the gel is dry. You don't need to use water. The alcohol in the gel kills the germs on your hands.

Don't underestimate the power of hand washing! The few seconds you spend at the sink could save you trips to the doctor's office.

Eat well, exercise a lot and keep your coughs and colds covered—
Happy Holidays!!