

Hand washing



According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hand washing with plain soap and water is the most important thing you can do to reduce the spread of infectious disease in your ECE program and at home.

Create a policy in your ECE program that states when and how to wash hands.

This helps everyone understand the importance of hand washing.

You should you wash your hands:

- ◆ when you arrive in your ECE facility.
 - ◆ after changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet, even if you wear gloves.
 - ◆ before and after giving medication or treating or bandaging a wound.
 - ◆ after using the bathroom. Children often need help remembering this and they need help with doing it.
 - ◆ before and after you cook or handle food (especially raw meat and poultry).
 - ◆ before you eat.
 - ◆ after you clean.
 - ◆ after you touch animals, including pets, or pet toys, food, leashes, or waste.
 - ◆ before and after you take care of a sick child.
 - ◆ after you handle body fluids, blow your nose, or sneeze or cough into your hands (or you help a child do this) or after helping a child with a runny nose.
- ◆ after you work or play outside.
 - ◆ after touching garbage, liners or cans.
 - ◆ whenever they look dirty.
 - ◆ more often when there is an infectious disease spreading in your facility or community.

How should you wash your hands?

Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold) and apply plain (not antibacterial) soap. Using antibacterial soap may lead to the development of disease resistant bacteria (superbugs), making it harder to kill these germs in the future. Foaming hand soap is easy to use and saves on soap and water use. Avoid bar soap; it can be a source of germs.

- ◆ Always use soap; without it, you just get rid of the surface dirt.
- ◆ Rub your hands together to make a lather and scrub them well.
- ◆ Be sure to scrub
 - ◇ the backs of your hands.
 - ◇ your wrists.
 - ◇ between your fingers and
 - ◇ under your nails where germs can hide (using a nail brush helps with this).
- ◆ Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds. To help you remember how long to wash, sing or hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- ◆ Rinse your hands well under running water.
- ◆ Dry hands from fingertips to wrist with a clean paper towel (rubbing with a paper towel will remove more germs from your hands).
- ◆ Turn off faucet and open door (for adult bathrooms) with paper towel. These "high touch" surfaces may be home for lots of germs. Researchers have found that faucet handles are among the most contaminated surfaces in child care centers.



- ◆ Children need help with washing their hands. Provide instruction and supervise them while they are washing. Post a picture prompt at the sink.

What if you don't have soap and running water?

Washing your hands with soap and running water is the best way to reduce the number of germs on them. If soap and running water are not available, staff and children over 24 months of age can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Make sure that it contains at least 60% alcohol. Avoid hand sanitizers that contain triclosan. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but sanitizers do not eliminate all types of germs, especially when hands are dirty.



Hand sanitizers don't work well when you can see dirt on your hands. Germs hide under the dirt.

How do you use hand sanitizers?

- ◆ Apply the product to the palm of one hand.
- ◆ Rub your hands together.
- ◆ Rub the product over all surfaces of your hands and fingers until your hands are dry.
- ◆ Instruct and supervise children on proper use.

Hand sanitizer precautions: Hand sanitizer is flammable and if you keep large containers of hand sanitizer in your facility, they need to be stored like flammable liquids. Keep hand sanitizer out of the reach of children. In the first five months of 2020, the American Association

of Poison Control Centers reported 9,504 alcoholic hand sanitizer exposure cases in children under the age of 12 years and they caution that even a small amount of alcohol can cause alcohol poisoning in children. Children should be discouraged from licking their hands after applying hand sanitizer. While there is no evidence that children have been poisoned from this behavior, it is a necessary precaution. You can reach your local poison control center by calling the Poison Help hotline: 1-800-222-1222. To save the number in your mobile phone, text POISON to 797979.

Resources

CDC, (2008) [An Ounce of Prevention: Keeps the Germs Away, Seven Keys to a Safer Healthier Home](#)
 CDC, (2020) ["Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives"](#)
 CDC, ["Show Me the Science - Why Wash Your Hands"](#)
 American Cleaning Institute and the Centers for Disease Control, ["Don't Hand Those Germs to Me"](#)
 Upstate New York Poison Center, [Hand Sanitizing Gels: A Poisoning Risk for Children](#)