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The importance of hand washing for kids

Proper hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of germs and viruses. See how to teach hand washing in a fun way and other ways to stay healthy.

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a clean hand is a caring hand.

Did you know proper hand hygiene is the #1 way to prevent the spread of germs?

Follow these simple steps for proper hand hygiene.

Soap and water

- 1 Turn on water
- 2 Wet hands
- 3 Apply soap to palm of one hand
- 4 Scrub for 20 seconds
- 5 Rinse
- 6 Dry with paper towel
- 7 Turn off water with a clean towel

Hand sanitizer

- 1 Apply to palm of one hand
- 2 Rub over both hands
- 3 Let dry

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What is the importance of hand hygiene?

Cleaning your hands – either with soap and water or by using hand sanitizer – may seem like a small action, but it's one that can have a significant impact on your health.

"Hand hygiene is an important lifetime habit for staying healthy," says [Michael Sebert, M.D.](#), Medical Director for Infection Prevention and Control at Children's Health™ and Associate Professor at UT Southwestern. "It can help reduce the risk of catching infections such as colds, flu, other respiratory viruses and gastrointestinal illness."

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), washing hands could protect about 1 of 3 young children who get sick with diarrhea and 1 of 5 young children with respiratory infections like pneumonia.

Cleaning your hands not only helps reduce your risk of catching germs, but from spreading them, too – especially to others who may be more susceptible to illness.

When should hands be washed?

It's helpful to make regular hand hygiene a part of your daily routine. Specifically, hands should be cleaned:

- After using the restroom
- After changing a diaper
- Before eating
- Whenever hands are visibly dirty
- After contact with bodily fluids
- After coughing or sneezing, after throwing away your tissue
- After touching animals, such as family pets or at a petting zoo

When should hands be washed?

How to wash hands using soap and water:

1. Turn on water faucet.
2. Completely wet hands with water.
3. Dispense soap into the palm of one hand.
4. Scrub all surfaces of the hands, including between the fingers, vigorously for at least 20 seconds.
5. Rinse hands under running water.
6. Dry hands with paper towel and discard.
7. Using a clean paper towel, turn off water faucet.

How to wash hands using waterless alcohol hand sanitizer:

1. Apply an adequate amount of hand gel or foam into the palm of one hand. Do not use water.
2. Spread the product over all surfaces of both hands, including all surfaces of all fingers.
3. Rub hands together until dry.

The CDC recommends using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

How can you encourage children to wash their hands?

Teaching children hand washing at an early age is a good way to encourage a lifelong habit. Make your child feel good about hand washing by tying it to fun activities such as snack time and cleaning up from arts and crafts. Have your child practice counting or sing a song while they wash their hands, to make sure they do not rush. Soap or sanitizer that foams, changes color or smells good can be exciting for kids as well.

One of the best ways to encourage your child to clean their hands is by washing your own. "Kids watch and learn from their parents," says Dr. Sebert. "Make sure to model good hand hygiene to keep your family healthy."

How else can you prevent the spread of germs and viruses?

Beyond practicing proper hand hygiene, families can take simple, everyday precautions to help prevent the spread of germs and respiratory viruses. Reduce your risk of getting sick or spreading illness by:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Not touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- [Staying home](#) when you are not feeling well
- Coughing into your elbow and covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing (throw tissue into the trash after sneezing)
- Disinfecting surfaces with household cleaning sprays or wipes
- Staying up to date on all immunizations including COVID-19, flu and RSV for babies under 8 months old

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