

HANDWASHING

BACKGROUND



Handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infections. Hands are warm, moist, parts of the body that come in frequent contact with germs that cause contagious illnesses. Young children have not yet learned healthy personal habits; they suck their thumbs, put things in their mouths and rub their eyes. Many children also like to handle animals and pets, which often carry a variety of germs. These habits can spread disease. Germs are easily spread when hands touch people, pets, and things.

Rubbing hands together under running water is the most important part of washing away infectious germs. Disposable wipes and waterless hand cleaners should not be used as a substitute for washing hands with soap and running water. Wipes should only be used to remove residue, such as food off a baby's face or feces from a baby's bottom during diaper changing. When running water is unavailable such as during an outing, a wipe may be used as a temporary measure until hands can be washed under running water. A child care provider may use a wipe to clean hands while diapering a child who cannot be left alone on a changing table that is not within reach of running water. However, hands should be washed as soon as diapering is completed and child is removed from the changing table. Water basins should not be used as an alternative to running water. If forced to use a water basin as a temporary measure, clean and disinfect the basin between each use. Outbreaks of disease have been linked with sharing wash water and washbasins.

Caregivers must learn why, when, and how to correctly wash their hands and the children's hands. Included in this section are instructions on "HOW" and "WHEN" to wash hands, for both staff and children. Babies' hands can be washed with soap and running water using the same procedure that is used for older children.

SOAP

Liquid soap should be used in child care because children do not have the dexterity to handle a bar of soap. Soap does not have to be antibacterial to be effective. It is the physical action of handwashing that removes soil.

FINGERNAILS

It is important to keep fingernails short and clean. Fingernail brushes are effective in removing stool from under nails. Fingernail brushes should be sanitized daily (use Santizing Solution page 13).



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GLOVES

- Gloves are **NOT** a substitute for handwashing.
- Single use gloves must be disposed of **after each use**, and hands must be washed.
- Staff should wear gloves if they have open cuts, sores, cracked skin, or if the child has open areas on the skin.
- Gloves should be worn when changing the diaper of a child with diarrhea or a known infection that is spread through the stool.
- Pregnant women or women considering pregnancy may want to wear gloves when changing any diaper.
- Gloves **MUST** be worn for handling blood (nosebleeds, cuts) or items, surfaces, or clothing soiled by blood or bloody body fluids.
- Wear gloves when cleaning bathrooms, diapering area, or any areas contaminated with stool, vomit, or urine.
- Either single use or utility gloves may be used for cleaning and disinfecting contaminated items or areas (see section on “Cleaning and Disinfecting”).

WHEN HANDS SHOULD BE WASHED




Children:

- upon arrival at the child care setting
- immediately before and after eating
- after using the toilet or having their diapers changed
- before and after using individual water play items, water tables or moist items (such as clay)
- after playing on the playground
- after handling pets, pet cages or other pet objects
- whenever hands are visibly dirty
- after sneezing or coughing

Providers:

- upon arrival at work
- immediately before handling food, preparing bottles or feeding children
- after using the toilet, assisting a child in using the toilet or changing diapers
- after coming in contact with a child’s body fluids including wet or soiled diapers, runny noses, spit, vomit, etc
- after sneezing or coughing
- after handling pets, pet cages or other pet objects
- whenever hands are visibly dirty
- after cleaning
- before and after giving or applying medication or ointment to a child or staff
- immediately after removing gloves used for any purpose, even if hands are not visibly dirty
- before going home
- before and after eating, drinking, smoking or taking a break
- after handling one food and before another

HOW TO WASH HANDS

- Always use warm running water and a mild liquid soap. Antibacterial soaps may be used but are not required. Disposable wipes and hand sanitizers do not effectively clean hands and do not take the place of handwashing.
- Wet the hands and apply a small amount (dime to quarter size) of liquid soap to hands. 
- Rub hands together vigorously until a soapy lather appears and continue for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to scrub between fingers, under fingernails, and around the backs and palms of hands.
- Rinse hands under warm running water. Leave the water running while drying hands.
- Dry hands with clean paper towel. Avoid touching the faucet handles or towel holder with clean hands.
- Turn the faucet off using the towel.
- Throw towel in a trash can lined with a plastic bag. Trash cans with foot-pedal lids are best.
- Hand lotion may be used to prevent chapping. Use liquids or tubes that can be squirted so that the hands do not have direct contact with container's spout. Direct contact with the spout could contaminate the lotion inside the container.
- When assisting a child in handwashing, either hold the child (if an infant) or have the child stand on a safety step at a height at which the child's hands can hang freely under the running water. Assist the child in performing all of the above steps and then wash your own hands.