



Recommendations for Handwashing in Child Care Settings

Part 1. When to wash hands

Handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of infections. Eighty percent of common infections are spread by hands. Washing hands at least five times a day has been shown to significantly decrease the frequency of colds, flu and other infections.

Caregivers should wash hands:

- Before preparing food
- Before eating
- After using the washroom or helping a child use the washroom
- After changing diapers
- After blowing your nose or wiping a child's nose

Children should wash hands:

- Before eating or helping with food preparation
- After using the washroom
- After blowing their nose

Part 2. How to wash hands

The five steps to handwashing are:

1. Wet your hands.
2. Apply soap.
3. Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds.* Be sure to wash the fingertips, the nails and between the fingers.
4. Rinse for at least 10 seconds.
5. Dry hands, preferably with a disposable towel.

* This step can be timed by teaching children to sing the Twinkle Twinkle Song or another song that lasts for 20 seconds while they wash their hands.

Twinkle Twinkle Song

Twinkle twinkle little star
See how clean my two hands are
Soap and water, wash and scrub
Get those germs off, rub-a-dub
Twinkle twinkle little star
See how clean my two hands are.

Part 3. Antibacterial soap

Bacteria are all around us and make up 60% of the living matter on earth. Life cannot exist without bacteria. Most bacteria are good but a few bacteria are bad and cause disease. Good bacteria live on the skin, in the mouth and in the intestines and protect against disease-causing germs and help with body functions.

Antibiotics kill both good and bad bacteria. That is one reason why it is important to not use antibiotics when they are not really needed. Antibacterial soaps are not recommended because they kill good bacteria. When good bacteria are killed, the protection they provide against infections is lost.

- Use regular soap that does not contain antibacterial agents
- Regular soap will remove the dirt and grease that attract bad bacteria
- Regular soap will not kill the good bacteria that live on the hands
- Using antibacterial products unnecessarily increases the concentration of antibiotics in the water supply and in the environment

Part 4. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers

- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not a substitute for handwashing and should only be used when soap and water are unavailable
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not effective in the presence of dirt and grease
- Wash hands with soap and water, as soon as facilities are available, after using hand sanitizers
- Because alcohol-based hand sanitizers cause the skin to become dry, it is important to use sparingly to prevent open cracks in the skin, which are potential sites of infection
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not cause antibiotic resistance

About these recommendations

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These recommendations have been reviewed by the Provincial Health Office, Alberta Health and Wellness.

These recommendations are approved for distribution by Alberta Children's Services.

Questions? info@dobugsneeddrugs.org

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