



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 can be spread by the 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
- Before and 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. Alcohol-based hand rubs

- Alcohol-based hand rubs are quick to use. They are especially convenient when soap and water are not available.
- These products need to be at least 60% alcohol to be effective, so check the label.
- Alcohol-based hand rubs do not cause antibiotic resistance.
- Alcohol-based hand rubs kill many bacteria and viruses, but are not effective against some of the germs that cause diarrhea.
- Alcohol-based hand rubs don't work if your hands are greasy or visibly dirty. These products don't clean your hands and are not a substitute for handwashing
- These products are safe for children if used with supervision. Alcohol-based hand rubs are poisonous if ingested. Children should not put their hands in their mouths until the alcohol evaporates (about 15 seconds).
- Wall dispensers and containers of alcohol-based hand rubs should be placed so that they cannot be reached by small children.
- Alcohol-based hand rubs are flammable and should not be stored near a source of heat.

About these recommendations

This document was developed by Do Bugs Need Drugs? A Community Program for the Wise Use of Antibiotics.

These recommendations have been reviewed by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health and Wellness.

These recommendations are approved for distribution by Alberta Children and Youth Services.

Questions? info@dobugsneeddrugs.org or 1-800-931-9111