

Tip Sheets

Practicing Proper Handwashing

Keeping hands clean is especially important to staying healthy and helping prevent the spread of illnesses and respiratory and diarrheal infections. Staff should teach and model good handwashing skills and assist children that need help.

To be effective, it is important that handwashing is done correctly. For example, *you must rub your hands for at least 20 seconds to get rid of the bacteria*. The proper steps to handwashing should be posted at handwashing sinks throughout the child care setting. Instructional signs with pictures can also help children to follow the steps. (See additional resources section for printable signs).

Handwashing Instructions

1. Wet hands with running water
2. Use liquid soap
3. Wash hands for 20 seconds
4. Rinse hands with running water
5. Dry hands with single service, disposable paper towel
6. Turn off faucet with the paper towel
7. Throw paper towel in the lined trash can

Use Regular Liquid Soap

Regular liquid soap is effective in removing soil and germs and is recommended in child care settings because bar soap can harbor bacteria.

Antimicrobial soaps are not recommended as there is concern their use could lead to strains of resistant bacteria, doing more harm than good.

How Germs Spread

Hands are the most exposed part of the body to germs. Touching your eyes, mouth, nose, or food can transfer germs into the body. Germs can spread from other people or surfaces when you:

- Touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Prepare or eat food and drinks with unwashed hands.
- Touch contaminated surfaces or objects.
- Blow your nose, cough, or sneeze into hands and then touch other people's hands or common objects.

Key Times to Wash Hands

You can help yourself and your child care program stay healthy by washing your hands often, especially during the following key times when you are most likely to catch and spread germs.

Children and providers should wash hands:

- After arriving and before leaving
- After using the toilet
- After using the playground, gym, or large muscle room
- After contact with bodily fluids
- After touching garbage
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After contact with pets, pet cages, and other pet products, pet food/treats, or animal waste
- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before and after eating
- Before and after caring for someone at home who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea

- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- Before and after using water tables, play dough, or sensory materials
- Whenever hands are visibly dirty

Additionally, providers should wash hands:

- Before assisting children at mealtimes
- Before and after applying medication or ointment
- Before and after dispensing oral medications
- After diapering or assisting a child who has used the toilet

Cleaning Hands with Hand Sanitizer

Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations. If soap and water are not available, you may use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol (check the label to make sure).

Although sanitizers can quickly reduce germs on hands in many situations, they might not:

- Get rid of all types of germs.
- Be as effective when organic matter (dirt, food, grease, or other material) is visible on hands.
- Remove harmful chemicals, like pesticides and heavy metals, from hands.

*Swallowing alcohol-based hand sanitizers can cause alcohol poisoning if more than a couple of mouthfuls are swallowed. **Keep it out of reach of young children and supervise their use.***

How to Use Hand Sanitizer

1. Make sure all visible dirt, grease, and other organic matter is removed from hands.
2. Apply product to the palm of one hand. Use enough to cover all surfaces of your hands.
3. Rub hands together, making sure to cover all surfaces of hands and fingers, until hands are dry and all hand sanitizer is absorbed (this should take around 20 seconds).

Additional Resources

MN Dept. of Health | Hand Hygiene
www.health.state.mn.us/people/handhygiene

MN Dept. of Health | Hand Hygiene Print Materials
www.health.state.mn.us/people/handhygiene/materials.html

CDC | Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives
www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html

CDC | Handwashing Fact Sheets
www.cdc.gov/handwashing/fact-sheets.html

CDC | Handwashing Posters
www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html

CICC | Proper Handwashing Techniques Printout
https://www.inclusivechildcare.org/sites/default/files/courses/swf/Proper_Handwashing_Techniques_-_Text_Only.pdf

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

Copyright © 2020 Center for Inclusive Child Care

These materials may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. Information in this tip sheet has been modified from multiple sources.

Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.