

# HANDWASHING

## General information

Hands are warm, moist parts of the body that come into frequent contact with germs that cause communicable illnesses. Young children have not yet learned healthy personal habits. They suck their fingers and/or thumbs, put things in their mouths, and rub their eyes. These habits can spread disease, but good handwashing can help reduce infection due to these habits. Caregivers who teach and model good handwashing techniques can reduce illness in childcare settings and schools. **Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.**

**Handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infections.**

Included in this section are instructions on **WHEN** to wash hands (see pg 58) and pictures to demonstrate **HOW TO** do the correct handwashing procedure (see pg 59).

## Childcare and school staff information

- Learn why, how, and when to correctly wash their hands and the children's hands.
- Follow a procedure that ensures safety for the infant or child.
- Teach young children to wash hands and supervise them as they do.
- Encourage children to wash hands.

## Recommendations for hand hygiene products

- **Liquid soap**
  - **Recommended** in childcare and schools since used bar soap can harbor bacteria. Regular liquid soap is effective in removing soil and germs.
  - Soap and water are necessary if hands are visibly soiled.
  - When using liquid soap dispensers, avoid touching the tip of the squirt spout with hands.
  - If the liquid soap container is refillable, the container and pump should be emptied, cleaned, and dried completely before being refilled.
- **Antimicrobial soaps**
  - Are **not recommended** by the American Medical Association and the CDC.
  - Many scientists are concerned that use of these soaps could lead to strains of resistant bacteria. There is no need to use these soaps, which may actually do more harm than good.
  - Must be left on hands for about two minutes in order to have any effect on bacteria.
- **Alcohol-based hand rubs**
  - 60% to 90% alcohol (usually 70%). Read the label and follow manufacturer's instructions.
  - Advantages of alcohol-based hand rubs are:
    - ◆ Require less time and are more effective than handwashing with soap and water.
    - ◆ Act quickly to kill germs on hands.
    - ◆ More accessible than sinks.
    - ◆ Reduce bacterial counts on hands.
    - ◆ Do not promote bacterial resistance.
    - ◆ Less irritating to skin than soap and water (product contains moisturizers).
  - Disadvantages of alcohol-based hand rubs are:
    - ◆ **Should not** be used on visibly soiled hands since they are ineffective in the presence of dirt, soil, or food.

## HANDWASHING

Any product should be safely stored out of reach of children.

- **Procedure for using alcohol-based hand rubs**

- Use enough alcohol-based hand rub to cover all surfaces of the hands and fingers.
  1. Apply alcohol-based hand rub to palm of one hand.
  2. Rub hands together covering all surfaces of hands and fingers.
  3. Rub until hand rub is absorbed.

- **When soap and running water are not available**

- When soap and running water are not readily available, for example, on a field trip, an alcohol-based hand rub can be used. The alcohol-based hand rub must be applied vigorously over all hand surfaces. If hands were visibly soiled, **hands must be washed with soap and warm running water as soon as it is available, because the alcohol-based hand rubs are not effective in the presence of dirt and soil.**
- DO NOT use a common water basin. The water can become contaminated very quickly.

## Towels

- Use single-use paper towels to dry hands or use hand dryers.
- DO NOT use multi-use towels such as hand towels, kitchen towels or dish cloths.

## Fingernail care for staff and children

- Keep fingernails short and clean.
- Staff should moisten cuticles to avoid hangnails.
- Clear fingernail polish that is well maintained may be worn; avoid colored nail polish since it is difficult to see dirt under nails.
- Use fingernail brushes to remove dirt and stool from under nails. Use the nailbrush after diapering or assisting with the toilet activities, before and after food preparation, and whenever nails are soiled.
- Artificial nails are **highly discouraged** from use since they are known to harbor germs even with good handwashing techniques. They can break off into food and have been implicated in disease outbreaks in hospital nurseries. Check with the local licensing agency regarding any food codes that may restrict staff from wearing artificial nails when handling and preparing food.

## Ways for staff to keep hands healthy

- Cover open cuts and abrasions less than 24 hours old with a dressing (e.g., bandage).
- Use warm water, not extremely hot or cold and just enough soap to get a good lather.
- Rinse and dry hands completely.
- Use the soap product that is least drying to hands.
- Use hand lotion regularly to keep skin moist. Use products with a squirt spout so hands do not have contact with the container.
- Wear gloves outside in the cold weather.
- Wear utility gloves for direct hand contact with harsh cleaners or chemicals.
- Wear work gloves when doing yard work, gardening, etc.