

ARE YOU READY?



Good, clean fun: A hand-washing guide for teachers and day care providers

The lessons kids learn in the classroom, at after-school programs and in day care centers can stick for a lifetime. Reading, sharing, writing, teamwork, arithmetic, sportsmanship and responsibility are just a few they'll likely pick up as they face the challenge and excitement of growing up. Help them stay healthy for the journey by adding another lesson to the roster: hand-washing. It's a lesson that's not only good for kids, but one that can keep you from getting sick too.



Science time



Classrooms and day care settings can be the perfect place to pass around the germs and bacteria that cause disease. Many times, germs are spread when kids cough or sneeze (so, don't forget to remind them to use their elbows – not their hands – to cover their mouths and noses if a tissue isn't handy). But the germs and bacteria that can cause a feverish flu or a bad cold can also be transferred to surfaces such as doorknobs, desks, crayons, books and toys. And they can stick around on those surfaces for hours.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost 22 million school days are missed each year just due to the common cold. However, studies have shown that elementary school students who wash their hands properly miss fewer school days than students who don't.

Hand-washing can be especially important in day care settings for both provider and child. In such settings, very young children may need a lot of “hands-on” care, such as holding and diaper changing. Luckily, studies have linked proper hand-washing in day care to fewer kids coming down with diarrhea. In fact, health experts have cited poor hand-washing as one of the top reasons for the spread of illness in day care centers.



Lesson plan

As you know, kids not only learn by doing, they also learn by watching. That’s why it’s important that you be an example of healthy behavior and wash your hands too. Here are the keys to good hand-washing: Wash vigorously using warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds. Don’t forget to wash the back of your hands, under your nails and around the wrist area. If possible, dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. Use the paper towel to turn off the faucet.

After teaching proper hand-washing, it may help to make hand-washing one of the rules of good behavior. Put up signs near the bathroom reminding kids to wash their hands or make sure they line up for hand-washing before and after snack time. And don’t forget that this is more than just good manners, it’s good science too. Try teaching hand-washing as a science lesson – explain why clean hands make for healthy bodies.

Learning is fun

There are many ways to make hand-washing a fun experience, especially for younger children. For story time, read a book about hand-washing – there are many available. Create a group hand-washing song that lasts at least 20 seconds. Ask children to draw pictures of germs or make a hanging mobile of germs with colorful construction paper and yarn.



Try the glitter experiment: Put a little glitter on children’s hands and have one group wash with soap and the other group just use water – the group that uses soap will have cleaner hands. Or ask a child with glittered hands to shake hands with a child who has no glitter to demonstrate how germs can spread.



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The Get Ready hand-washing campaign is supported by a grant from the Colgate-Palmolive Company.