

Teaching Handwashing to Young Children

Handwashing really is our best defense against many kinds of bacteria and viruses that cause infection. Children typically don't like to take the time to wash their hands, but there are ways you can make it fun using games, songs and teaching them about the germs.



Teaching Tips

Young children, Toddlers and preschool age, learn through their senses: touching, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling. Because germs can't be seen, felt, tasted, or heard, making them tangible through play is a great way to teach the importance of proper handwashing.

- Singing handwashing songs
- Drawing and coloring
- Building and crafts
- Telling stories—read books about washing and germs.

We have gathered some resources available online to help you make germs more real for them. We also added a few examples on the back.

Help Them Wash & Make It Easy

1. Supervise their handwashing after they use the toilet and before they eat.
2. Let them see you wash your hands throughout the day and wash your hands with them.
3. Put handwashing reminders at their eye level.
4. Every time they wash their hands, reward them until it is a habit.
5. Keep a stool by the sink so that they can reach easily.

Activities and Tools

Henry the Hand — www.henryhand.com

Tool kit that includes curriculum, science projects and more. In addition the site offers interactive handwashing songs and videos, coloring pages, and posters.

Scrub Club — www.scrubclub.org

Interactive handwashing games and songs, computer wallpaper and screensavers and coloring sheets and posters.

Glo Germ — www.glogerm.com

Free downloadable worksheets for kindergarten through 6th grades in English and French. Black UV lights, Glo Germ lotion and powder are available to buy from this company.

Handwashing Toolkit — www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/curricula/index.html

Build your own toolkit for teaching ages 3-6, with activity ideas, discussion questions and book list.

Cathy Abraham's Curriculum — www.units4teachers.com/PDF/handwashing.pdf

Ideas to encourage handwashing, including bulletin board tips, songs, jokes, finger plays and others.

Activity Idea 1: Everything You Touch

You need: White paper, crayons, and tape.

1. Have children draw and color pictures of small germs on paper. Make up your own germs or print some from www.scrubclub.org.
2. Have children tape the pictures around the room on everything they touch over the course of a 1/2 hour.
3. Look around at the room at the end of that time and talk about how they themselves pick-up and spread germs like these to all of these things.

Activity Idea 2: Glitter Germs

You need: Shaker of glitter, soap and water, sink or bowl, and towels.

1. Put a small amount of glitter on children's hands.
2. Put children into 2 groups: have group 1 wash their hands with soap and group 2 without soap.
3. Show how soap gets rid of the glitter (germs) better than water alone.
4. Next, put glitter in your hand and then touch the children's hands, shoulders, hair, etc. to show them how the glitter was transferred. Explain how germs are also transferred in this way.

Source: Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Activity Idea 3: Germs Are Mobile

You need: Scissors, glue, paper hole punch, string, 2 wire hangers, crayons and white cardstock paper.

1. Have children draw pictures of germs on cardstock and color them—about 16.
2. Label types of common germs on the bottom — *E. coli*, flu, *Shigella*, Crypto, Staph, *Listeria* and *Salmonella*.
3. Cut out the germs, glue 2 back-to back (for all of them), for a total of 8 2-sided germs.
4. Put one hanger inside the other crosswise, then twist together at the top.
5. Punch a hole in the top of each germ pair and tie on a string.
6. Tie on the germs spaced out along the hangers at different lengths.
7. Talk about the different germs, then hang up at a visual reminder. Hang near the sink if possible.

Activity Idea 4: Sing-a-long

Sing to Row, Row, Row Your Boat, which takes the right amount of time for proper handwashing -15-20 seconds.

*Wash, wash, wash my hands,
Make them nice and clean.
Rub the bottoms, and the tops,
And fingers in between.*

Books For Young Children

Buddy Bear's Hand Washing Trouble
Marjorie T. Cooke

Your Skin and Mine
Paul Showers

Wash Your Hands!
Tony Ross

Germs on Their Fingers (also in Spanish)
Wendy Wakefield Ferrin

*Those Mean Nasty Dirty Downright Disgusting
... But Invisible Germs*
Judith Anne Rice

Germs Make Me Sick
Melvin Berger

The Ten Potato Scrub
Marjorie T. Cooke

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