

PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN



Pinellas County Health Department

Steps to a HealthierFL—Pinellas County

The Power of Hand Washing

A delicious mud pie, a good-luck rock or a friendly frog are just a few of the presents children love to bring home to Mom and Dad. But did you know that behind these adorable gifts - and countless others - millions of germs could be lurking?

Kids may not always listen when you tell them to wash their hands before eating, but it's a message worth repeating. Hand washing is by far the best way to prevent germs from spreading and to keep your kids from getting sick.

The First Line of Defense Against Germs

Germs - such as bacteria and viruses - can be transmitted several different ways, especially by touching dirty hands or changing dirty diapers. Other ways germs spread include:

- through contaminated water and food
- through droplets released during a cough or a sneeze
- through contaminated surfaces
- through a sick person's body fluids

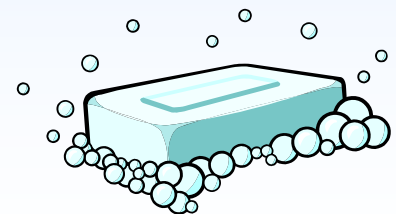
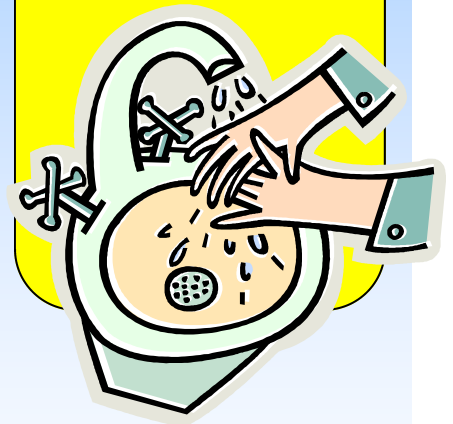
If kids pick up germs from one of these sources, they can unknowingly become infected simply by touching their eyes, nose or mouth. And once they're infected, it's usually just a matter of time before the whole family comes down with the same illness.

So when are the best times to wash your hands?

- before eating or touching food (like if you're helping cook or bake, for example)
- after using the bathroom
- after blowing your nose or coughing
- after touching pets or other animals
- after playing outside
- after visiting a sick relative or friend

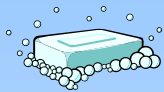
Good hand washing is your first line of defense against the spread of many illnesses - and not just the common cold. More serious illnesses such as meningitis, bronchiolitis, influenza, hepatitis A, and most types of infectious diarrhea can be prevented with the simple act of washing your hands.

One in three people do **not** wash their hands **after** using the restroom.

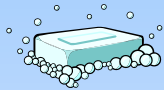


How to Wash Your Hands Correctly

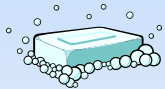
Here are some simple steps for scrubbing those germs away. Demonstrate this routine to your child - or better yet, wash your hands together with your child several times a day so he or she learns how important this good habit is.



Wash your hands in warm water. Make sure the water isn't too hot for little hands.



Use soap and lather up for about 10 to 15 seconds (antibacterial soap isn't necessary - any soap will do). Make sure you get in between the fingers and under the nails where uninvited germs like to hang out. And don't forget the wrists!



Rinse and dry well with a clean towel.

Don't underestimate the power of hand washing! The few seconds you spend at the sink with your child could save you trips to the doctor's office.

To minimize the germs passed around your family, make frequent hand washing a rule for everyone. You can't wear rubber gloves all day long, but you can wash your hands so those germs don't get a chance to make you or someone else sick. When germs go down the drain, they can't make anyone sick.

Happy Hand Washing!

http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/general/sick/hand_washing.html

If your **child** is reluctant about hand washing, try these tips:

- Use colorful soaps made especially **for kids**. Some soaps also come in interesting shapes or have fun scents to make hand washing fun!
- Have your child sing a favorite song while lathering up. By the time the tune is done, those germs should be washed away.



Funding for this newsletter was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 03135 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services, or the U.S. Government.

For information about **Steps to a HealthierFL-Pinellas County** visit our website: www.StepsFL.com or call (727) 820-4113.