

Why Is Hand Washing So Important?

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.

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 stopped with the simple act of washing your hands.

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.

1. Wash your hands in warm water. Make sure the water isn't too hot for little hands.
2. 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!
3. Rinse and dry well with a clean towel.

To minimize the germs passed around your family, make frequent hand washing a rule for everyone, especially:

- before eating and cooking
- after using the bathroom
- after cleaning around the house
- after touching animals, including family [pets](#)
- after visiting or taking care of any sick friends or relatives
- after blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing
- after being outside (playing, gardening, walking the dog, etc.)

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.

