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Parenting the Preschooler

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/pp/>

Handwashing

Handwashing is one of the "most important means of preventing the spread of infection," according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The quantity and variety of germs we carry on our hands everyday are astounding. And, unfortunately, a few of these can cause illnesses like diarrhea, colds, and other more serious, sometimes even life-threatening diseases. When we forget to wash our hands, or don't wash our hands correctly, we can spread these germs to other people.

If you wash your hands correctly, you will greatly reduce the chances of spreading germs, including those that have changed to protect themselves against an antibiotic, which is called antibiotic resistance. Disease-causing germs can enter your body when your unwashed hands touch your nose, mouth or open wounds. Unwashed hands can also pass germs onto food that you eat.

It is important that everyone make handwashing a personal health care priority. Teaching your children proper handwashing is an important part of keeping them safe from disease.

When Should You Wash Your Hands?

Before you:

- Prepare or eat food.
- Treat a cut or wound; tend to someone who is sick.
- Insert or remove contact lenses.

After you:

- Go to the bathroom.
- Handle uncooked foods, especially raw meat, poultry, or fish.

Change a diaper.

Blow your nose, cough, or sneeze.

Play with or touch a pet, particularly reptiles and exotic animals.

Handle garbage.

Tend to someone who is sick or injured.

How Should You Wash Your Hands?

How you wash your hands is just as important as when you wash them, especially when it comes to eliminating germs. Just rinsing them quickly is not enough.

- ▶ Use soap and warm, running water.
- ▶ Wash all surfaces thoroughly including wrists, palms, back of hands, fingers, and under fingernails.
- ▶ Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds.
- ▶ When drying, if possible, use a clean or disposable towel, and pat your skin rather than rubbing to avoid chapping and cracking.
- ▶ Apply hand lotion after washing to help prevent and soothe dry skin.

Child care providers who are on the Internet Kidcare list serve (kidcare@extension.umn.edu) provided these creative ideas for getting children to wash their hands:

- ▶ Have the children wash their hands for as long as it takes them to sing the "Happy Birthday" or the "ABC" song. (Each song takes 20 seconds to sing -- the time needed to properly wash hands.)

- ▶ Sing either of these two songs to the tune of Row, Row, Row Your Boat:

"This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands. This is the way we wash our hands, so we can eat our snack."

"Wash wash wash your hands; Play our handy game. Rub n scrub and scrub n rub; And dirt goes down the drain."

- ▶ Try to see who can make the best bubbles with soapy fingers!
- ▶ Using washable markers, write child's name or a design on their hands. Have them see how long it takes to wash their hands to make markings disappear.
- ▶ Use character soap dispensers in the bathroom.
- ▶ Have a step stool to help small ones reach the sink.
- ▶ Take pictures of children doing the whole routine of flush the toilet, wash hands, use soap, use paper towel, put in garbage, turn off light. Put pictures onto a laminated poster board.
- ▶ Show kids the importance of a good handwashing with an experiment.

First have the children rub Vaseline all over their hands and then sprinkle pepper on their Vaseline hands (the germs). You can also use something else with that type of flake texture if you don't like pepper.

Then you turn on the cold water and have them wash their hands without using soap. (This is how they might typically wash their hands) Have them show each other what washed off. More than likely, not much comes off.

Then you turn on the cold water again, only this time they can use soap. This still won't get their hands clean. It may take of a little of the pepper off but not much.

Finally you turn on warm water, have them wash with soap and warm water for a few minutes and miraculously their hands will come clean. Explain to them if they don't wash their hands with soap and warm water all the germs will stay on their hands just like the Vaseline and pepper did.

- ▶ Wet a white paper towel and rub down stair railings, door knobs, or something that gets a lot of dirty hands touching. Show your child how dirty the paper towel gets and explain that the dirt came from their hands.
- ▶ Hold your young toddler or preschooler over the sink (with a mirror so they can watch) and play a wash-up game before you eat or any time at all. They'll come to associate handwashing with a pleasant memory--time spent with parent or caregiver. Another way for children to have positive handwashing associations is to have older children help the younger ones wash up.

How effective are the new hand sanitizers?

Products such as Purell contain alcohol as an antibacterial agent. You rub a small amount of these products into your hands. Two points to consider before rushing out to purchase these products.

- ▶ **Cost.** These products are expensive and therefore would not be feasible on a daily basis. They are designed to be used where soap and water are not available, not to replace traditional hand washing.
- ▶ **Bacteria** tend to colonize on your skin in thin layers called biofilms, which increases their resistance to sanitizers. Since you are not removing bacteria and dirt from your skin by wiping your hands with paper towels, the sanitizers may not be killing the bacteria closest to your skin surface.

Sources:

"Don't Get Caught Dirty Handed!" Operation Clean Hands. 1997. Barbara Ingham, Food Facts Newsletter. University of Wisconsin Food Science Specialist. May, 1997.
Internet Kidcare list serve (kidcare@extension.umn.edu). 1998.

Note: Mention of brand name does not imply endorsement or discrimination.