



*Clean hands
save lives*

*Your mom is
telling you to
wash your hands
for the umpteenth
time and all you
want to do after
playing outside is
eat your lunch.*



Sound familiar? But what is so important about washing your hands anyway? While kids don't always listen when parents tell them to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, or when they come inside from playing it is actually a very important thing to do. Hand washing is by far the best way to prevent bacteria from spreading and to keep kids from getting sick.

Bacteria are microscopic organisms that live on, in and around people. They're extremely common naturally and you can find them in almost every environment on the planet, for instance in the sea, the air and even in our own bodies. Many bacteria are harmless and actually help us to stay healthy, for instance the good bacteria in our bodies that help us to digest food.

Some bacteria live on our hands without causing problems, but when you come into contact with large numbers of bad germs that can survive on your hands, (especially if your hands are warm, moist and unwashed) these can be transferred from your hands to your mouth and this can cause illness.

You can get germs on your hands when you touch objects and when you touch other people. Once germs are on your hands, they can get inside your body through a wound or when you touch your eyes, nose or mouth. You can also spread germs on your hands to objects or people that you touch. The most

common infections are spread through touching.

Although we may think that hand-hygiene preventable infections are minor health issues, the reality is that they have serious consequences. Diarrhoea alone kills more than 2 000 children worldwide each day. In the time it takes you to read this, another parent will have lost their child to a diarrhoeal disease.

Research by the Global Hygiene Council found that last year over 80% of children visited a healthcare professional due to a common infection. This number can be reduced through effective handwashing, but we know that this isn't routine for everyone.

Global research into the handwashing behaviour of adults has found that, on average one in ten don't wash their hands every time they use a toilet, and around one in four don't wash their hands before eating. Another 43% don't wash their hands every time they sneeze or blow their nose.

This not only makes them more likely to suffer hand-hygiene preventable infections, such as diarrhoea, but also increases the risk of infection for their children who are likely to pick up habits from their parents. This is because children are even less likely to wash their hands than their parents.



Because dirt (and germs) gets into every nook and cranny, it is important to wash your hands properly.

- First, wet your hands with warm water.
- Use a little soap and rub your hands together to make a lather.
- Next rub the palm of one hand over the back of the other (so it looks like you have ten fingers and one hand) and then swap hands.
- For your next move put your palms together again and interlace the fingers. Keep rubbing the soap in.
- Now rub the back of your fingers against the palms of the other hand.
- Wrap your right thumb with your left hand and wriggle it around until it feels clean. Swap hands.
- Squeeze your fingers together on your right hand and use them like a scrubbing brush on your left palm. Draw circles with your fingers, one way then the other. Swap hands.
- Rinse hands thoroughly with warm water.
- Dry hands with a clean, dry towel.
- Now your hands are clean it's time to get them messy again.

Regular handwashing is important, but especially before eating, after going to the bathroom, playing outside or with your pets, changing a baby's sibling's diapers and wiping or blowing your nose.

Handwashing is considered so important that it even has its own day! Every year, on 15 October, communities around the world highlight the importance of handwashing through Global Handwashing Day. The theme for this year's event is 'Make handwashing a habit!' The theme emphasises that handwashing must be practiced regularly to have an impact on health and wellbeing.



Download the activity book

Teachers, you can download the Hygiene Helpers activity book on handwashing for free here, http://www.hygienecouncil.org/Portals/1/pdf/HH_activitybook_ARTWORK.pdf

You can watch a video on the importance of handwashing, here.



Five facts showing the importance of handwashing:

- It is estimated that washing hands with soap and water could reduce diarrhoeal disease-associated deaths by up to 50%.
- Researchers in London estimate that if everyone routinely washed their hands, a million deaths a year could be prevented.
- A large percentage of foodborne disease outbreaks are spread by contaminated hands. Handwashing can reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses and other infections
- Handwashing can reduce the risk of respiratory infections by 16%.
- In a study involving 16 primary schools and 6 000 students, the use of an alcohol hand sanitiser in the classroom provided an overall reduction in absenteeism due to infection by 20%.

