



# Handwashing for Healthy Families



Handwashing is one of the best ways to keep your family healthy. By frequently washing your hands, you avoid spreading diseases.

This handout is designed to help you teach your child good handwashing habits to reduce sick days, trips to the clinic, and worry about missing school, work, or other fun events.

## Germs can make you sick

Some germs – including viruses and bacteria – can make you sick. After making it past our body's defenses, germs begin to multiply and infect us. When our bodies work to fight off infection, we may show signs of illness, like fever, headache, and/or cough.

## How germs spread

Germs spread when we:

- Touch, kiss, hug, or share drinks or eating utensils
- Breathe in droplets in the air after a person speaks, coughs, or sneezes
- Touch surfaces with droplets on them, then touch our eyes, nose, or mouth

## Handwashing is important

Although it might seem simple, don't underestimate the power of handwashing! Handwashing is an effective way to remove germs and avoid getting sick.

**Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth** until your hands are clean because germs spread that way.

## Teaching good handwashing skills

Healthy handwashing can become a lifelong habit if you start teaching your child early. Begin by explaining that washing your hands helps prevent you from getting sick and making others sick. Remind your child that when they are sick, they miss out on fun, like playing with friends. Then, teach them the best way to scrub germs away!

### To make handwashing easier, if your child can't reach the sink:

- Keep a stool in your restroom
- Get a faucet extender
- Place a towel in easy reach

## Easy handwashing steps

Just like your hand has five fingers, there are five steps to good handwashing:

**STEP 1 Wet** – Wet your hands with clean, running water.

**STEP 2 Soap** – Lather your hands with soap. Any soap will do!

**STEP 3 Scrub** – Scrub for 20 seconds or longer.

Make sure to get in between your fingers and under the nails. Don't forget your wrists!

**STEP 4 Rinse** – Rinse your hands under running water.

**STEP 5 Dry** – Dry your hands with a clean towel.

## Make it fun

You can find ways to make handwashing fun by singing a handwashing song, like this:

*Twinkle, twinkle little star  
Look how clean my two hands are  
With soap and water, wash and scrub  
Got those germs off,  
rub-a-dub-dub  
Twinkle, twinkle little star  
Look how clean my two hands are*

You can also get a kid's soap dispenser or use foaming or fun-shaped soaps.

**Making sure your family is up to date on vaccines** is another way you can prevent illness. Vaccines tell your body how to recognize and fight a disease before it becomes a problem.

## When to wash

It's especially important to remind your child to wash their hands after using the restroom, after playing outside, after touching pets, after coughing, sneezing, or blowing their nose, and before eating.

## Rinse and repeat

Building handwashing skills takes time. In the beginning, your child will need regular reminders of how and when to wash their hands. Once handwashing becomes a regular part of your child's day, it's more likely that they will practice it throughout their lives.

## Lead by example

Just like other healthy habits you want to teach your child, by washing your hands frequently throughout the day, you set a powerful example.

**When soap and water are inaccessible**, use a quarter-sized amount of hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Rub your hands until they are dry.

## For additional information

For more info, about Healthy handwashing: [www.cdc.gov/Handwashing](http://www.cdc.gov/Handwashing)

Also, visit Native Boost, a project dedicated to providing high-quality vaccination information for Native parents and their health providers: [www.npaihb.org/Native-Boost](http://www.npaihb.org/Native-Boost).

