

# Fight Germs! Wash Your Hands!



*Washing your hands often and well is an easy way to help prevent the spread of many infections, including the common cold. Illinois law sets standards for handwashing in child care centers and day care homes. Here are some recommendations that can also help you address Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmarks 22.A.ECa and 22.A.ECb.*

## What are the best times to wash hands?

*Children should wash their hands* as soon as they arrive at the child care center or day care home, AND...

- BEFORE going home
- AFTER using the bathroom, sneezing, touching the nose, playing with an animal, playing outside, playing with toys that other children use, or touching anything soiled with body fluids or wastes (such as blood, saliva, urine, stool, or vomit)
- BEFORE AND AFTER eating, cooking, or otherwise handling food
- ANYTIME hands look, feel, or smell unclean

*Parents and teachers should wash their hands* as soon as they arrive at the school or child care center, AND...

- BEFORE handling food or bottles, giving or using medicine or ointments, or going home
- AFTER using or helping a child use the toilet, changing a diaper, touching any body fluids (from a runny nose, for example), handling pets or pet objects (cages or leashes, for example), handling objects used by children, removing gloves used for any sanitary purpose, using a telephone, or caring for or touching a child who is ill
- ANYTIME they go to another room in the school or child care center or move to a different group of children
- ANYTIME hands look, feel, or smell unclean

## What is the best way to wash hands?

*Use warm, but not hot, running water.* Run the “cold” water first. Then, gradually increase the amount of warm water, testing the temperature yourself before the child puts her hands under the tap. [Note: Safety experts say it's best to keep water heaters set at no higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Celsius).]

*Avoid shortcuts.* Use soap. (Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are now being studied, but, at present, soap is recommended for handwashing in child care settings. Never leave hand sanitizers within the reach of young children.) Wash the front and back of both hands. Remember to clean under nails. Wash for at least 15 seconds. (This is about how long it takes to sing the alphabet song.) Rinse well.

*Dry your hands* with a fresh paper towel or an automatic dryer. Then use the towel to turn off the faucet. Note: Do not use automatic dryers for infants and toddlers. Closely supervise other children under 6 years of age who use these dryers.

*Help young children wash their hands* using the above method. As they become experienced, you can teach them how to wash their hands while you supervise.

---

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



Children's Research Center  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469  
Telephone: 217-333-1386  
Toll-free: 877-275-3227  
E-mail: [iel@illinois.edu](mailto:iel@illinois.edu)  
<http://illinoisearlylearning.org>



Illinois  
State Board of  
Education