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Hand-washing tips for parents and caregivers

Families share pretty much everything: meals, chores, clothes, cars, computers, celebrations...and germs. In such close living quarters, it can be easy to pass disease-causing germs around the dinner table, bring them home after soccer practice or tuck them in at bedtime. But that doesn't have to be the case. This year, create a new family tradition to help your children stay healthy: hand-washing.



Family facts



Much of the time, illnesses such as the flu or a cold pass from person to person when we sneeze or cough. However, germs can also spread when we touch the same surfaces as a family member who is sick, such as a desk, doorknob or the kitchen counter. These viruses and bacteria can live on our hands and on surfaces for hours.

Unfortunately, kids are awfully good at passing around germs and bacteria, many times bringing them home along with their schoolwork. And with busy family schedules and so many fun distractions, it can be hard to get kids – especially younger children – to take time out for hand-washing. But it's well worth it.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost 22 million school days are lost each year just to the common cold. Luckily, proper hand-washing makes a difference.

Studies have shown that elementary school children who use proper hand-washing techniques miss fewer days of school than children who don't. And besides preventing a nasty

cold or a case of the flu, studies have also shown that proper hand-washing can prevent kids from coming down with pneumonia-related illness, diarrheal infections and some skin infections.



Take the lead

To make hand-washing a family affair, it's important that you take the lead. In other words, become a hand-washing role model for your little ones. After all, parents and caregivers can share germs too.

Hand-washing seems simple (and it is), but by following a few proven methods, you can maximize the benefits of clean hands for yourself and your family. Here's the run-down: Wash your hands under warm water and with

soap for at least 20 seconds – or to make it more fun for the kids, sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice. Don't forget to wash more than just the palms of your hands – germs can stick under nails, on the back of your hands and around the wrist area.

Always wash your hands before, during and after preparing food – a routine that can also reduce your and your family's risk of foodborne illness. Also, wash your hands after rolling around with the family pet or handling its waste, after taking out the garbage, if you're around someone who is sick and, of course, after using the rest-room.

Away from home? Consider carrying around a small bottle of alcohol-based hand sanitizer for when soap and water aren't available.



It's fun to stay healthy

Through the eyes of a child, hand-washing can seem like just another chore. So, make hand-washing an enjoyable experience.

Buy special, fun-shaped soap just for the kids. Keep colorful stools next to the sinks so the smaller children can easily reach the faucet. Tell stories about hand-washing – a number of children's books about the importance of clean hands are available. Create your own 20-second hand-washing songs and have a family sing-a-long during hand-washing time.

Clean hands are good for the whole family. It's one family tradition that can keep your kids healthy far into the future.



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The Get Ready hand-washing campaign is supported by a grant from the Colgate-Palmolive Company.