

# Handwashing Tips

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3 items involve hand washing: # 8, #9, and #10.

**Incorrect Handwashing Procedures:** The most frequent problem is that teachers and children do NOT use the correct hand washing procedure. Usually, teachers/children first get soap on hands and then wet hands. This is **incorrect**. You must **get hands wet first**, then get soap. (Hand washing is less effective when soap is put on hands before hands are wet). See below for appropriate procedure.

- a. Moisten hands with warm water, then use liquid soap (non-antibacterial). Rub hands together for **20 seconds**. (e.g., Sing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” twice or count to 20 or count to 10 in English and then count to ten in Spanish, etc.) NOTE: Be sure hands are OUT of the stream of water when rubbing together so soap will make lather.
- b. Rinse hands free of soap under running water.
- c. Dry hands with a clean, disposable paper towel or air dry with a blower. NOTE: Air dryers without automatic sensor should be turned on using elbow, etc. (but not clean hands).
- d. Avoid recontamination when turning off faucets. For example, turn off faucets with paper towel, elbow, etc. (not hands).  
**TIP:** In some situations, teachers might find it easier to prevent faucet-related contamination by turning the water on, leaving it on until all children have washed their hands, and then turning the faucet off (teacher).
- e. Throw the used paper towel into a trashcan. NOTE: Make sure that children do not recontaminate their hands when throwing away the paper towel by touching the trash can lid.

1. **Recontamination of clean hands:** The second most frequent issue is that children recontaminate their hands after washing hands **BEFORE meals/snacks**. Examples of ways children recontaminate their hands before meals/snacks include:

- a. turning off the faucet with their clean hands instead of a paper towel
- b. touching the automatic sensors at the sink (after washing their hands)
- c. turning on hand air dryers by touching the “on” button with clean hands (use elbows instead)
- d. touching lid of trash can as they throw away paper towels
- e. touching the walls/floors in the bathroom as they stand in line waiting for other children to finish washing their hands
- f. touching objects (e.g., backpacks, coats, toys) after they wash their hands before they eat

**NOTE:** A recent ECERS clarification from the author makes it ok to use hand sanitizer (see below). We strongly encourage teachers to use hand sanitizer when children arrive at the cafeteria. If you use hand sanitizer, make sure they “wash hands” thoroughly by rubbing sanitizer in between their fingers, on backs of hand, etc.

2. **Hands not washed at appropriate times:** The 3<sup>rd</sup> frequent problem is that children/teachers do not wash their hands at appropriate times. This is most frequently an issue with item # 10 (Health Practices). Pay close attention to times that hands should be washed:

- Upon arrival in the classroom; when re-entering classroom after outdoor play
- Before and after shared use of wet materials, such as play dough or water
- After play with shared sensory materials, such as sand, or after messy play
- After dealing with bodily fluids (e.g., blood, running noses, sneezes, coughs) or making significant skin contact (e.g., applying lotions, sunscreen, medications)
- After touching contaminated objects and surfaces, such as trashcan lids, pets, the floor, etc.

3. Picture/word reminders/instructions of hand washing steps should be displayed and used with the children when needed to teach sanitary practices.

**Author Clarification regarding the use of hand sanitizer (July, 2011):** Handwashing and hand sanitizer use: The 2011 edition of *Caring for Our Children* (page 113) states that hand sanitizers can be used in place of handwashing unless hands are visibly soiled. Use can be by adults and children 2 years of age and older. Therefore the use of hand sanitizers is acceptable when scoring these indicators as long as the product contains 60-95% alcohol, manufacturer's instructions are followed, and very close supervision of children is provided to ensure proper use and to avoid ingestion or contact with eyes and mucous membranes. Be sure to check to be sure that the manufacturer's directions for use are followed exactly, because if not, do not give credit for any time when not followed. You should ask to see the original container with directions for use, if it is not observable. If children are not closely supervised when using the sanitizer, consider in supervision-related indicators for the item specifically, and also in Safety and Supervision.

If hands are visibly dirty, handwashing, according to the required procedure is still required, although the time for rubbing soapy hands together before rinsing is changed to 20 seconds rather than the original 10 seconds. Antibacterial soaps should not be used. Children using shared art or sensory materials must wash hands, or use hand sanitizer according to directions, both before and after use.

Handwashing or use of a hand sanitizer is required for all ERS observers upon entering the program.

**Recommendation:** Read the following pages in the ECERS-3 scale:

#8 Meals/snacks: pages 28-29

#9 Toileting/diapering: pages 30-31

#10 Health practices: pages 32-33

NOTE: It was previously acceptable to wash hands for only 10 seconds. A 2011 clarification from the author has raised the time required to wash hands from 10 seconds to 20 seconds.