



# Good Hygiene

Good hygiene is more than just looking neat and clean—it can also reduce the spread of disease. Therefore, good hygiene affects the health and well-being of children as well as the people with whom they spend their day.

Children seldom stay clean for long. Healthy young children will explore their environment and play with sand, mud, water and paints. Their clothes and bodies often get very dirty during the day at school or child care. This is different from “poor hygiene,” which generally means that children are not bathed, always look messy, and have behaviors that spread disease. When the children who attend a child care program arrive for the day clean, it helps keep everyone healthier.

Young children may ignore or tease children who smell bad or look dirty, which can affect their self-esteem. When children start the day with clean hair, body and clothes, playmates and caregivers respond more positively.

It’s important to spend time with young children practicing and teaching good hygiene both in child care and at home. The best way children learn to assume positive health habits is by including them in their daily routine. Until children can do this, adults who care for them must take on this task. Here are some things to do for children to help them develop good personal hygiene habits and feel good about themselves.

**Handwashing** Good handwashing, practiced frequently, can reduce illness and remove dirt which may contain toxins such as lead. Unwashed or improperly washed hands are the primary carriers of infections. Young children need your guidance and reminders to wash their hands before they eat and after they toilet, play outdoors or handle animals. Set up your handwashing sink with a step stool so children can start washing their hands themselves. Use liquid soap and paper towels.

## Nose blowing, coughing and sneezing

Nose blowing, cough and sneezing spread germs. Children can be taught to blow their noses (always with their

mouth open), dispose of the tissue and then wash their hands. They can also be taught to sneeze or cough into tissue or into their elbow. Keep plenty of tissues on hand, and discourage nose picking.

**Hair** Hair which is clean (washed at least once or twice a week) and brushed makes it easier to detect head lice and scalp rashes. Early detection allows for early treatment and reduces the chance of disease or parasites spreading to other children.

**Nails** Dirt and germs often hide under fingernails. Children scratch their genitals, put their hands in their diapers, pick their noses, scratch rashes, and put their hands in their mouths. Keeping children’s nails clipped and clean reduces the spread of germs to others.

**Toys** If a child has a favorite toy or blanket that gets carried around constantly, it may be full of germs from many sources. Cloth toys and blankets should be laundered regularly; plastic toys should be run through the dishwasher or dipped in a bleach solution (one tbsp. of bleach in one quart of water) daily, then allowed to air dry.

**Clothes** Clothes should be clean, comfortable and appropriate for the weather.

**Oral Hygiene** Toothbrushing at least once per day with fluoride toothpaste and flossing prevent gum diseases and tooth decay by reducing the build-up of decay-causing plaque. Proper toothbrushing and flossing is a learned skill, improved by practice, and in the meantime children need help from their parents and child care providers. Regular toothbrushing times during child care will help not only help protect children’s teeth but help them learn to brush and floss.

**Bathing** Although it does not usually take place at child care, regular bathing is important and allows a child’s entire body to be examined for signs of injury, rash or sores.

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