

## Tips for Handwashing

Washing your hands and your child's hands often and well is one of the best healthy habits to develop. Hand washing seems so basic and routine that it is often taken for granted. Children touch and explore the world around them. Getting dirty is an important part of growing up! Not only do germs stick to their hands, but so do many toxins. Lead, arsenic, and pesticides are often found in soil outside and in dust inside. Children need to learn how to wash their hands effectively to help keep germs and toxins out of their growing bodies.

**Scrub vigorously!** Some germs and toxins have “sticking” power. Scrubbing all surfaces of the hands – palms, backs and in between all the fingers, loosens the dirt so it can be washed away. Use a fingernail brush for nails. Keep on scrubbing for 20 seconds – about the time it takes to sing “Row, row, row your boat” or “Happy Birthday” through two times.

**Plain soap and water are best for hand washing.** Plain soap and water do a good job of removing germs and toxins. Antibacterial soaps are not needed. A study conducted by Columbia University<sup>1</sup> found that antibacterial soaps have no extra benefit over plain soaps. In fact, antibacterial soaps may contribute to the growing number of resistant bacteria, making it harder to kill harmful germs when needed. Alcohol-based or waterless hand sanitizers are not effective at removing toxins. The sanitizing action comes as the alcohol evaporates from already clean hands. Dirt and toxins are not removed when the alcohol evaporates.

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<sup>1</sup> Larson, Elaine; “Hygiene of the Skin: When is Clean Too Clean?” *Emerging Infectious Disease Journal* 2001; Vol. 7, No. 2.



**On the go – tips for hand washing away from home.** Keep soap packed in the diaper bag, backpack, snack bag, stashed in the car, or in the stroller. Consider bringing a water bottle on outings. Not only will you have a handy drink, you'll also have all you need to wash hands.

**Wash hands often, including before naps and bedtime.** It is important to wash hands after using the toilet, changing diapers, before eating, and after playing outside. Wooden play-sets and other pressure-treated wood built before 2004 may contain arsenic which can come off on children's hands. It is also important to wash hands before nap time or bedtime, particularly for children who suck their thumb.

**Wash pacifiers and toys too.** Toxins in the dust and dirt also stick to dropped pacifiers and toys. Keep a supply of washed pacifiers and mouthing toys ready to swap as needed.

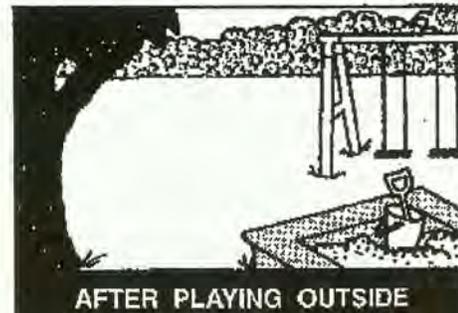
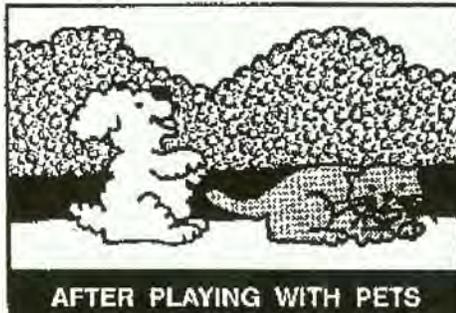
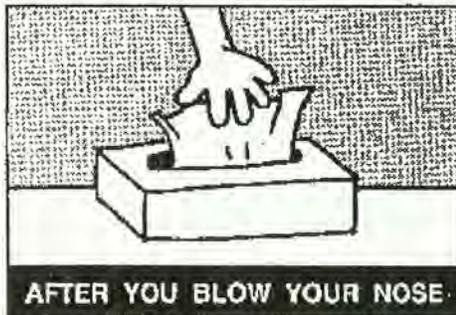
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