

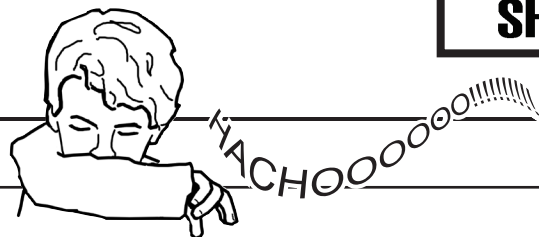
# Preventing Illness



Germs are all around us even though we never see them! Germs can make us sick if they get inside our bodies.

Your child has learned two ways to prevent this from happening:

1. Cover coughs and sneezes
2. Wash hands carefully



## Cover Coughs and Sneezes

Coughing and sneezing can spread germs into the air or onto your skin. The air from our body has thousands of tiny drops of water, which contain germs. Sometimes we can't feel or see these drops of water, but they can be sprayed a long distance through the air when we cough or sneeze. They may even float in the air for a long time before they settle onto the ground or other surfaces.

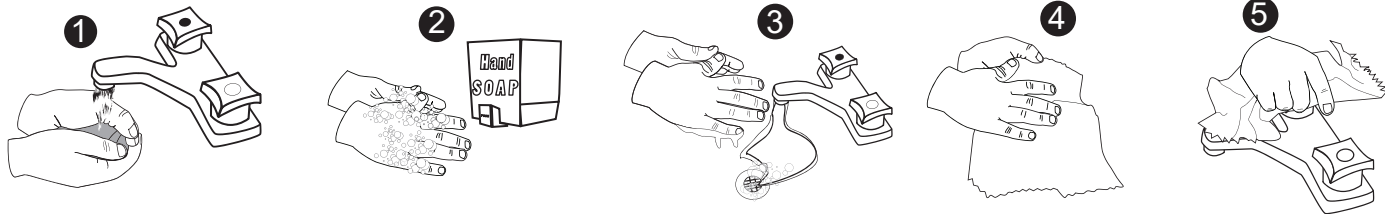
If we encourage children to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, we can help prevent the spread of illness. Your child has been taught to cover his or her mouth with a tissue. Then, throw

the tissue away. If a tissue isn't available, he or she knows to cough or sneeze into his or her elbow or sleeve so that the germs go onto clothes rather than into his or her hand. A person can also sneeze into his or her hand but would need to wash his or her hands right away.

Do you ever get tired of asking your child to wash his or her hands? Your reminders are important! Hand washing is the best way to stop the spread of germs. Your child has been learning to wash his or her hands carefully and often.

## G-E-R-M-S: Steps for Washing Away the Dirt and Germs

Here are the five steps to proper hand washing your child has learned. Try counting them off on your hand or spelling the word "germs" as your child follows each step.



Step One: **G**et your hands wet while the water is running.

Step Two: **E**nergetically, use soap and rub your hands together. Work up a good lather. Wash vigorously for 18 to 20 seconds.

Step Three: **R**inse your hands and let the water drip into the sink.

Step Four: **M**ake sure you dry your hands with an individual towel or paper towel.

Step Five: **S**hut off the faucet handle with the used towel.

Be sure to wash wrists, back of hands, between fingers, and under fingernails. A good way to make sure you wash long enough is to count to 20 or hum a short song twice, such as *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* or *Happy Birthday*.

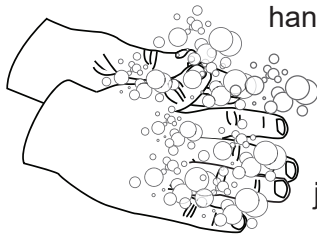
It's best to open the door of the bathroom with the used towel. Then, throw it away.

## What If You Don't Have Soap or Hot Water?

Using soap to wash hands helps dirt and germs dissolve and rinse away more easily. If soap is not available, use friction and running water for 20 seconds to help clean hands. Water should be a comfortable temperature. Water that is hot enough to kill germs would burn your skin.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are great to use when water is not available, such as when you are riding in a car or at the park. In order for hand sanitizers to work, they must contain at least 60% alcohol. So, you need to help your child use a

hand sanitizer. Avoid leaving the bottle out where a child can get to it without your help. The bottles note that the sanitizer should be kept out of the reach of children just like any other poison.



## When Is It Important to Wash Hands?

Try to make frequent hand washing a habit for your child. Encourage family members to remind each other to wash hands, especially at these times:

✓	before and after eating
✓	after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
✓	before and after preparing food
✓	before and after going to the bathroom
✓	before and after contact with someone who is sick or large groups of people



## You Can't Always Prevent Illness

Scheduling regular check-ups with your child's doctor is another way to help your child stay as healthy as possible. Talk with your child about the importance of telling an adult right away if he or she doesn't feel well. If you don't know if your child should stay home from school, talk with your child's doctor to be sure.

## Want More Information on Diseases?

Contact your local Public Health Department if you would like more information about specific diseases. They often have written information on different diseases and their signs and symptoms. They also have information on what you should do as a parent or family member. A public health nurse may be able to answer your questions or help you find someone who can help.

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). This website has a lot of information about many different diseases and how to keep your family healthy.