

## The Importance of Hand Washing

The Division of Early Childhood Education wants to reinforce the importance of hand washing as a significant preventive measure for reducing the spread of germs. Properly washed hands are key to the health of children and caregivers in childcare centers and preschool classrooms.

Both children and adults should wash their hands several times throughout the day as recommended by the [National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Early Care and education Programs, Third Edition Standard-3.2.2.1](#); as follows:

- Upon arrival to the classroom.
- Re-entering the classroom after being outside.
- Before and after eating, handling food, feeding a child, or giving medication.
- After using the toilet or helping a child use a toilet.
- After diaper changing or changing soiled underwear.
- After dealing with bodily fluids.
- After handling pets and other animals.
- Before and after playing in sandboxes (or water table).
- Before and after sharing wet materials.
- After emptying or handling the garbage

Thorough hand washing with soap for at least 20 seconds, using warm, running water (no less than 60 degrees F and no more than 120 degrees F) removes germs and allows them to be rinsed away. Clean, disposable paper towels should be available for drying hands and turning off faucet handle. Since many children do not have the dexterity to handle a bar of soap which might also be contaminated with bacteria if not properly drained, liquid soap is recommended.

Health practices including hand washing are also measured by the Early Childhood Environmental Ratings Scale Third Edition (ECERS-3) as part of a standard classroom observation. Preschool classrooms are generally lacking in this area and should look to the ECERS as one way to measure their effectiveness in ensuring that health and hygiene standards are maintained.

The Environmental Rating Scales Institute (ERSI) allows the use of hand sanitizers, even if

running water/soap are available, if the hands are not visibly soiled. The New Jersey Department of Education recommends the best practice of using soap and water, whenever possible. However, during an outing such as a field trip or on the playground, these methods can be used as a temporary measure until hands can be washed under running water. Finally, pre-moistened cleansing towelettes should not be used as a substitute for washing hands with soap and running water when running water is available. Please consult with your district nurses for any additional training or questions you may have about child illness and the development of program policies to ensure the health and safety of our children.