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Hand washing key to keeping germs at bay

Germs spread quickly in schools, but there's a simple way to stop them – wash your hands! Alberta Health Services is encouraging parents to teach their children the importance of washing their hands at home to help stop the spread of germs and illness at school.

“Washing your hands often and well is a habit that needs to be taught and practiced,” says Dr. Marcia Johnson, Deputy Medical Officer of Health for Alberta Health Services. “Even in this age of technology, hand washing is our best defense against disease.”

Children should be taught to wash their hands:

- At the beginning of the day and after coming home from school
- Before making, serving or eating food
- After using the toilet
- After handling garbage
- After touching anything that might be a source of germs, like wiping your nose, coughing into your hand, or playing in the playground

What is the best way to wash? Dr. Johnson recommends rubbing your soaped hands together for 20 seconds, or about the length of time it takes to sing *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* – do not forget to wash palms, between the fingers, backs of hands, thumbs, wrists, and fingertips and nails, too. You should rinse under running water, then dry with a paper towel and use a paper towel to turn off the taps.

School bathrooms should use liquid soap and provide paper towels, rather than hot air dryers, as bacteria can be removed by the friction of the paper towels. Bathrooms should also have working water taps that are controlled by the user. Spring-loaded taps, which must be held by the user to keep the water flowing, do not permit good hand washing.

Dr. Johnson stresses it is not necessary to use anti-bacterial or anti-microbial soaps as they have no proven infection-control or prevention benefit; in fact, they promote antibiotic resistance.

“Regular hand washing with regular soap and water is the most effective way to prevent the spread of germs,” says Dr. Johnson.

Residents with any other health-related concerns can call Health Link Alberta to speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 780-408-LINK (5465) or outside the local calling area, toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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