

# **Study suggests handwashing compliance in child care facilities is insufficient**

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# Infection Prevention *and You*

## Preventing infections in child care facilities

Because their immune systems are less developed, children younger than five are more susceptible to infections. Learn how to stop the spread of germs in child care facilities and keep everyone healthy.



**Clean your hands often. Keeping your hands clean is the number one way to prevent the spread of infection. Clean your hands:**

- Before and after eating, feeding a child, or preparing food
- After using the bathroom or helping a child use the bathroom
- Before and after diapering a child
- Before and after giving medication or treating sores, cuts, or scrapes
- After sneezing, blowing your nose, coughing, or handling other bodily fluids such as blood or vomit
- Before and after playing in water that is used by more than one person



**Stay up-to-date on vaccines and stay home if you are sick.**  
This applies to children, parents, and child care workers.



**Make sure surfaces are cleaned regularly.**  
There should be a schedule for when each item is cleaned with an EPA registered disinfectant or a bleach solution, including diaper changing areas and toilets, toys, bottles, and sleeping areas.



**Follow food safety guidelines** to prevent food-borne illnesses.



**Make sure the center follows best practices** regarding the health and safety of child care, such as those published by *Caring for Our Children*.



**For more information:**  
[www.apic.org/InfectionPreventionAndYou](http://www.apic.org/InfectionPreventionAndYou)

**Resources**  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Flu Information for schools and child care providers. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>.  
National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, Third Edition. <http://cloc.nccelrk.org/>.  
North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education. [http://hcdhikidcare.nc.gov/parents/pr\\_xrd\\_chec.html#exp](http://hcdhikidcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_xrd_chec.html#exp)  
United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service. A guide for safe food handling and sanitation for child care providers. <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wfs/Default.aspx?Menu=Appendix>.  
University of California San Francisco. California Childcare Health Program. <http://ccphp.ucsf.edu/>.



Credit: Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology

Child care personnel properly clean their hands less than a quarter of the times they are supposed to, according to a study published in the December issue of the *American Journal of Infection Control*, the official journal of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC).

A new study from the University of Arkansas used video cameras to record handwashing habits and compliance among child care workers at an [early childhood](#) center in northwest Arkansas. The researchers found that personnel and parents at the facility on average followed proper handwashing procedures only 22 percent of the time before and/or after tasks such as wiping noses, emptying garbage cans, preparing food, changing diapers, or using their cell phones. Caregivers washed 30 percent of the time it was called for, with paraprofessional aides at 11 percent, and parents at 4 percent.

"Handwashing is an important component of reducing illness transmission among children in early childhood centers, especially for the adults in charge of their care," said lead study author Jennifer Henk, PhD. "As we seek to improve overall quality in early childhood settings, our study shows the need to adopt creative strategies to increase handwashing compliance and efficacy."

Surveillance cameras were used to randomly record 25 hours of handwashing compliance in ten different classrooms. The center was aware of the cameras, but not alerted to the primary purpose of the study. There were a total of 349 handwashing opportunities in the 25 hours; 78 corresponding handwashing events took place for an overall compliance rate of 22 percent. Handwashing opportunities and events were based on guidelines for early [child care](#) established by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The guidelines outline sequential

handwashing steps that need to be followed, including use of warm water, soap, paper towels, and continuing for 20 seconds. This study confirms the results of previous studies in this area that there is a need for funding of education and training about proper hand hygiene.

"Hand hygiene in early childhood centers is especially important because children under five years of age have only partially developed immune systems, increasing their susceptibility to communicable diseases," said Susan Dolan, RN, MS, CIC, FAPIC, president of APIC. "Studies have shown that children who spend time in an early childhood care center are two to three times more likely to acquire infections than children cared for in the home, with respiratory and gastrointestinal infections posing the highest risks."

Handwashing can prevent about 30 percent of diarrhea-related sicknesses and about 20 percent of respiratory infection in children, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

**More information:** Jeffrey Clark et al, An observational study of handwashing compliance in a child care facility, *American Journal of Infection Control* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ajic.2016.08.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajic.2016.08.006)

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