



Germs - Why do I need to wash my hands?

Fact

- Washing your hands with soap and water removes bacteria from your hands. It is not only the soap that does this, but the friction caused by rubbing your hands together and rinsing with water.
- You carry millions of bacteria on your hands all the time. Most of them are harmless, but you can pick up some that cause illnesses, like colds, flu, and diarrhoea.
- When we forget or don't wash our hands properly, we can spread these germs to other people, or give them to ourselves by touching our eyes, mouths, noses or any cuts on our bodies.
- You should always wash your hands before you prepare or eat food.
- You should always wash your hands after you've been to the toilet, blown your nose, coughed or sneezed and after you've touched pets, rubbish or have been playing outside.

Do you know

- You can also pick up germs anything you touch that has been touched by other people, especially if they aren't good hand washers.
- After someone sneezes the germs in the air from the sneeze float in that place for about 10 minutes.
- The germs from someone with a cold can survive on something like a door handle, table or computer keyboard for over 20 minutes – sometimes longer!
- Germs come in all sorts of different shapes and sizes and can cause different types of sickness. But they are so so tiny you can't see them without strong microscopes.

Experiments you can do

Vaseline dust test

What you need:

- Vaseline
- Newspaper
- Some dust
- Some dirt
- Some "100s and 1000s"
- Some one to help you
- Cold water
- Soap and warm water

What you do:

Lay the newspaper out on the kitchen sink and sprinkle the dust and dirt and “100s and 1000s” on to it. Rub some Vaseline into the palms of your hands. Press your hands onto the dust, dirt and “100s and 1000s”. The “100s and 1000s” are like the bacteria and germs in the dust and dirt. Shake your hands over the newspaper and see how much of the dust, dirt and “100s and 1000s” come off. Rub your hands together. How much comes off now? Wipe at them with a dishcloth, does it all come off? Run your hands under cold water, does that help?

Now use soap and warm water. What are your hands like now, nice and clean?

Other Investigations

Think about all the things you touch each day and how many people may have touched them before you. Who touches the same things as you at home? How about at school? Do a survey of hand washing. Ask your family and friends questions about their hand washing activities. Do they wash their hands after going to the toilet? How about after touching a pet? Do they wash their hands before they eat or prepare food? Do they know why you need to do that? Maybe you could tell them why it's a good idea to wash your hands.

Jokes

Did you hear the joke about the germ?
Oh I better not tell you, you might spread it!

Why are kids a germs best friend?
A germ “nose” kids aren't “picky” about where they put their fingers!