

## Keep kids' hands clean with soap and water, not antibacterial products

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A note comes home from your child's teacher. Several children in the class are sick with strep throat. Should you stock up on germ-killing "antibacterial" soap?

Save yourself the trip to the store. Plain soap and water work just as well for basic hand-washing, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Hand-washing is an important way to help prevent or spread illness. Plain soap and water make bubbles and slippery skin, so the germs and dirt can slide off hands and down the drain.

Antibacterial soap kills most bacteria. However, it kills bad bacteria and good bacteria. The bad bacteria that survive get stronger and become harder to kill. This is why experts say antibacterial soap is not better than plain soap.

Recently, 19 antibacterial ingredients were removed from hand wash products because there was not enough evidence to prove they are safe, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Now, the antibacterial hand wash products you see in stores contain different ingredients: benzalkonium chloride, benzethonium chloride and chloroxylenol. These ingredients are still being studied. Consumers also should avoid buying products that claim to prevent infections from the flu, *Salmonella*, MRSA, *E. coli* and other bacteria and viruses, the FDA says.

To help parents and caregivers teach children how to clean their hands, experts offer the following tips:

### **Cleaning hands with soap and water**

**Step 1:** Wet hands under warm or cold water, turn off the faucet and apply soap to hands.

**Step 2:** Rub hands together for 20 seconds. (Sing or hum the "Happy Birthday" song two times.) Make sure children remember to scrub between their fingers, the backs of their hands and underneath fingernails.

**Step 3:** Rinse hands with clean, running water and dry with a clean towel or paper towel.

### **Cleaning hands without water**

**Step 1:** When soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer or antiseptic wipes. Follow the instructions on the label. Choose hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

**Step 2:** When using hand sanitizer, supervise children so they don't swallow it or get it in their eyes. Rub the sanitizer on the front and back of hands and in between the fingers until hands are dry. Do not rinse the sanitizer off hands.

If a child swallows hand sanitizer, call the Poison Hotline at 800-222-1222.

If you suspect that your child has strep throat, contact your pediatrician.

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