



Grandparents Corner

December 2011

Staying Healthy in School: Kid-Friendly Tips

Does it seem as if your child is sick all the time? In the early school years, your child's immune system is put to the test. After all, young children in large groups are breeding grounds for the organisms that cause illness. Here's why infectious illness is so common — and what your child can do to stay healthy in school.

How Infections Spread

Many childhood illnesses are caused by viruses. All it takes is a single child to bring a virus to school for the spread to begin. Consider this common scenario — a child who has a cold coughs or sneezes in the classroom. The children sitting nearby inhale the infected respiratory droplets and the cold spreads. Or, perhaps a child who has diarrhea uses the toilet and returns to the classroom without washing his or her hands. Illness-causing germs might spread from anything the sick child touches to other children who touch the same object and then put their fingers in their mouths.

Why Handwashing Counts

Frequent handwashing is one of the simplest — and most effective — ways to stay healthy in school. Remind your child to wash his or her hands before eating and after using the toilet, blowing his or her nose, or playing outside. Suggest soaping up for as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.

Common sense can go a long way toward staying healthy in school. In addition to frequent handwashing, teach your child other school health basics:

- **Use hand sanitizer.** *Give your child alcohol-based hand sanitizer to keep in his or her desk. Remind your child to use the sanitizer before eating snacks or lunch and after using a shared computer mouse, pencil sharpener, water fountain, or other community objects. You might also donate disinfecting wipes to the classroom for general use.*
- **Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.** *Give your child a package of tissues to keep in his or her desk. Encourage your child to cough or sneeze into a tissue — then, put the tissue in the trash, and wash his or her hands or use hand sanitizer. If it isn't possible to reach a tissue in time, remind your child to cough or sneeze into the crook of his or her elbow.*
- **Keep your hands away from your eyes and out of your mouth.** *Remind your child that hands are often covered in germs.*
- **Don't share water bottles, food or other personal items.** *Offer your child this simple rule — if you put the item in your mouth, keep it to yourself.*

Also, help your child avoid anyone who has a communicable infection. Close contact with a friend who's contagious — such as play dates or sleepovers — could lead to your child's own illness.

QUICK QUIZ

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is an increase in infectious diseases and a growing resistance to antibiotics. Therefore, effective cleaning techniques and basic health practices such as frequent handwashing are especially important. Read the issue and then answer True or False to the questions below.

1. The bathroom is the dirtiest place in the home. T F
2. It is important to keep pets off kitchen counter tops and dining tables. T F
3. The refrigerator should be kept on a cold setting. T F
4. To really clean produce, dunk it in a mild vinegar and water solution first (about ½ cup vinegar to 5 cups water), then scrub under tap water. T F
5. Mattresses contain flame-retardant chemicals that can seep into the air. T F
6. Chlorine bleach and ammonia cut through grease, but both are highly irritating to eyes and lungs and can be deadly when mixed, giving off potentially fatal toxic gas. T F
7. Simple handwashing can cut down on the number of people who become sick each cold and flu season. T F
8. The key to good handwashing is to do it often, well, and long enough (at least 20 seconds)! T F
9. You can help people stay healthy by washing your hands after you blow your nose and covering your mouth with a tissue or sneezing into the inner crook of your elbow.
T F
10. Having cataracts will not increase the risk of falling. T F

KEY: 1. F 2. T 3. T 4. T 5. T 6. T 7. T 8. T 9. T 10. F