



## Proper hand washing prevents illness and infection. Are you washing your hands enough?

Especially now that school is back in session, children need to practice proper hand washing. Frequent hand washing helps keep you healthy and prevents the spread of germs to other children.

Teach all children how to wash their hands properly, both in school and at home. Parents and teachers are a great example for teaching this healthy habit.

To make sure you have gotten rid of most of the germs on your hands, wash your hands

in warm, soapy water for at least 15-20 seconds, rubbing between your fingers and a little past your wrists.

Always wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap before and after you:

- handle food.
- go to the bathroom.
- treat a cut or scrape.
- blow your nose, cough or sneeze.
- handle garbage.
- change a diaper.
- care for someone who is sick.

Washing your hands frequently will help keep you healthy and prevent the spread of many common illnesses. Illnesses like colds, flu, diarrhea, chicken pox, pink eye and other infections are spread from person to person by germs on the hands.

Remember, if you or your child have any mosquito or bug bites, it is very important not to scratch the bite area. Wash it with soap and water. If you think your child is sick or may become sick, call your doctor and schedule an appointment.

## Safeguard your children against the danger of strangers

Children usually have a tough time understanding the concept of "strangers." If they've seen someone at their school or in their neighborhood before, they may not think of that person as a stranger because they've seen them before. Also, if the person doesn't look mean or scary, they may not seem like a dangerous person to a child. And remember to talk to older children and teenagers. They are at risk, too.

Here are some tips for parents and guardians to help safeguard children by teaching them what to do if they are approached by a stranger.

- Know where your children are at all times and when they should be home.

- Know who your children's friends are, where they live and how to get in touch with them.
- Never leave a small child alone at home or in the car, even for a few minutes.
- Teach your children that dangerous people don't necessarily look mean. They often smile and act friendly. Teach your children not to be tricked—be smart!
- Strangers are not only people your children don't know, but also people they don't know very well.
- Discuss with your children how to identify safe adults who they can go to when they are in danger—people like police and firemen.

- Use role-playing and "what if" situations so children can practice what to do in different situations.
- Teach children to never talk to, help, accept anything from or give information to people they don't know very well.
- Tell your children that if a person follows or grabs them, they should yell real loud. Teach them to shout, "I don't know you" so people know they are in trouble.
- Tell your children it is OK for them to fight back and make as much noise as they can to get help.
- Make sure your child knows how to reach you in an emergency. Teach your children how and when to call 911.

## First steps: Preparing your baby to learn to read

It is important for parents to start teaching and encouraging their children to read before they enter school. Children as young

as 6 months can begin to enjoy books. Here are some suggestions on how parents can help their children understand language and

begin to make connections between words and meanings.

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## Teach your child to walk to school safely

With the start of each new school year, it is very important to teach your children how to be safe and smart pedestrians.

Around 5,900 pedestrians are killed by automobiles each year. Almost one-third of those are under the age of 15 (source: National Safety Council). By following the tips below when walking to and from school, you can teach your children to be safe pedestrians.

- Always walk on the sidewalk. If there is no sidewalk, walk close to the curb and walk facing traffic. By walking facing traffic, you can see the cars coming and they can see you.
- The safest place to cross the street is at a crosswalk or corner where a car expects to stop. To cross, stop at the curb or the edge of the road. Look

LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT before crossing the street and if a car passes, look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT again.

- Wear white or light-colored clothing. This makes it easier for drivers to see you. At night you should also wear reflective material on your shoes, hat or jacket that reflects headlights.
- Obey all traffic signs. The “walk” signal or a green traffic signal indicates that it is your turn to cross the street but they do not mean that it is safe to cross. These signs mean look and then cross if no traffic is coming your way.
- Walk with a buddy. It is always safer to walk with a group.
- Walk only in areas that you are familiar with. Avoid short cuts through isolated areas, fields or alleys.

## Do you know when to take your child to the ER?

Your child can seem very sick, which can be difficult for a parent. Is my child sick enough to go the emergency room (ER)? Can it wait until my doctor’s office is open tomorrow? These are all questions you ask yourself in an emergency. At Texas Children’s Health Plan we are here to help you figure out what to do in these situations.

An emergency is when your child is in an immediate life-or-death situation, in serious pain, has stopped breathing or is having seizures. You need to call 911 or take your child to the nearest ER.

Some examples of emergency conditions include when your child has:

- Uncontrollable bleeding
- Difficulty breathing
- A fever over 100.3°F and is under 3 months old
- Severe stomach pain that lasts over several hours
- Severe burn

Non-emergency conditions include when your child has:

- A cold, sore throat or an earache
- Diarrhea or vomiting

Many of these conditions can lead to more serious problems, so it is important that you treat them, but you can treat these conditions with the help of your doctor without having to go to the emergency room.

Find a doctor that you can take your child to when he or she is sick or needs checkups and immunizations. Your child’s doctor will know how to best care for your child.

If you don’t know if you should take your child to the ER, try this first:

- Call your doctor. Even if it is late at night, your doctor will return your phone call and will be able to help you.
- Go to the Eastwood Clinic. The Eastwood Clinic is open later and on the weekends. After you visit the clinic, be sure to follow up with your regular doctor the next day. The clinic is located at:  
4500 Polk St.  
Houston, TX 77023  
713-926-9229  
Hours: MTTh 8:30-9;  
W 1-9; F 8-4; SSn 9-1

## Improve your child’s reading skills and understanding

If you need to improve your child’s reading skills, here are some suggestions to help your child understand more of what he or she is reading.

Have your child first think about the subject he or she is going to read about. Ask your child what he or she knows about the subject and what he or she wants to learn about the subject.

Have your child skim over the section he or she is going to read. Ask your child if he or she saw anything familiar and if he or she saw anything new.

After your child has read, ask your child what he or she has learned about the subject. Ask your child what his or her overall thought or impression is of what he or she read.

Have your child recall to you what he or she has just read. As your child reads, have your child stop often and put into his or her own words what he or she has just read. At the end of each section or chapter, have your child recall or review the main ideas.

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### First steps: Preparing your baby to learn to read

Birth to 1 year of age

- Play with your baby by telling them rhymes, talking to them and singing to them. This helps your baby learn spoken language.
- Look at picture books with your baby. Point and name the objects that the baby sees. Such as “Look at the puppy!” or “See the baby!”
- Give your baby soft or board books.

1 to 3 years of age

- Tell rhymes, talk, sing and play with your child.
- Read to your child every day.
- Let your child read to you by naming or pointing to the objects in the book or making up the story.