

Hand Hygiene

Maintaining Hygiene and Care for children with Multiple Disabilities including MDVI (Multiple Disabilities and Vision Impairment)

When children are at home, parents and caregivers are primarily responsible for supporting them to maintain proper hygiene –which includes washing hands on a regular basis.

This is important for the health and safety of children with disabilities as they 1) may be more at risk for health complications, 2) use their hands to explore people and objects and 3) may have their hands in their mouths more often. It can be difficult for children, especially those with severe needs, to understand the purpose of washing hands regularly.

Parents and caregivers can help children engage in meaningful, age appropriate activities or activities routinely done at home to increase the child's independence and to encourage them to participate in activities related to hygiene such as washing hands, bathing and wearing clean clothes.

When should children be encouraged to wash their hands?

Parents and caregivers can encourage children to wash hands before and after any activity that involves playing with/touching objects or activities like wiping a table (which involve coming into contact with a surface). It is also important after using the toilet and when coming in from outside of the home.

If the child does not participate in any specific activity, it is still important to ensure the child washes his/her hands before and after s/he eats his breakfast, lunch, dinner and any snack in between.

How can parents/caregivers best support children with hand washing?

Parents and caregivers should aim to have children be as independent as possible. Some children require verbal prompts in order to follow a thorough hand washing routine. Others require more physical support to engage in handwashing. Various strategies can be used as per the child's age and their level of ability.

Hand- under- Hand Technique

For children who require physical assistance for hand washing, hand-under-hand technique is the suggested method as it promotes the greatest independence for the child as their hands are being “guided”, but not controlled, by the caregiver. The activity can be performed while the child keeps his/her hand on the parent's hand. The caregiver's hands slowly guide the child's hands through the activity by gently supporting their movements. Some children do not like touching different textures like soap. With this technique, the caregiver's hands will touch the soap first and then slowly move away as the child becomes comfortable touching the soap. If the child resists touching the soap, this technique will provide security and the child may feel more comfortable doing the activity. For example, when the child is encouraged to wash his hands, the caregiver can touch the soap and gradually help him apply it on his hands as the activity is done together.



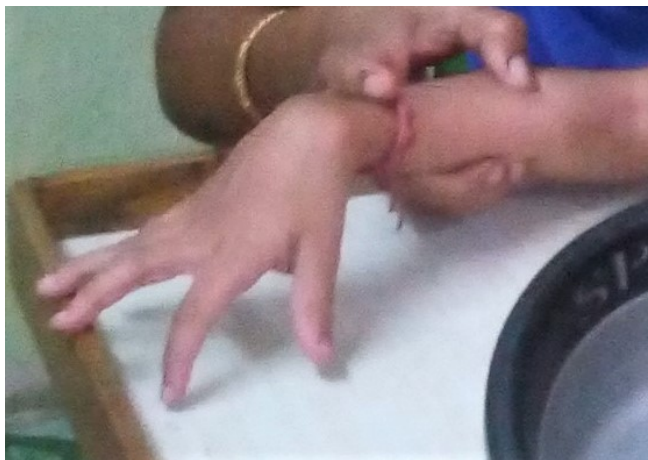
Hand-Over-Hand Technique

Some children may not cooperate with the hand-under-hand technique or they may need more physical support. If this is the case, hand washing can start by using hand-over-hand support and then gradually move to hand-under-hand. In this practice, the child can lead the activity but with the support of the parent. Hand-over-hand technique can be used to help the child do the activity by keeping the caregiver's hands gently over the child's hands. For example, the child can hold the soap to wash while the caregiver's hands will be over the child's hands. It is important to remember not to control the child's movements too much or they may feel like they are being forced through the activity instead of supported.



Prompts

If the child is able to do small parts of the activity by themselves, the support provided by the caregiver can be eased by either slowly pulling hands away or moving them to the child's wrist or arm. This way, the caregiver's hands are ready to come back and lend support whenever the child needs it.



Some additional points for maintaining good hand hygiene for your child:

- If the child has mobility issues along with vision impairment a small tub or vessel can be used to help the child wash his hands. It is important to change the water and use fresh water every time the child washes his hands in the tub.
- Many children have the habit of putting their hands/fingers in their mouth. It is recommended to keep a cloth near the child and encourage him to wipe his hands whenever possible. If the child is unable to do this on his own, he can be supported using the hand-under-hand technique.
- The child's brothers or sisters can be involved by encouraging the child to wash his/her hands. The child and his siblings can do the activity together.
- If the child can wash his hands independently, he can be encouraged to wash his hands regularly on his own.



[FOLLOW THIS LINK TO WATCH OUR VIDEO WITH SOME IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO INCLUDE YOUR CHILD IN A HAND-WASHING ROUTINE THAT NOT ONLY KEEPS HER SAFE FROM INFECTION, BUT INCREASES HER INDEPENDENCE IN HAND WASHING.](#)