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➤ BODY TALK

CLEAN Sweep

If the onset of summers gives you nightmares when it comes to keeping your children disease-free, here are some hygiene essentials that will keep them far away from a germ attack.

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Summer is here and so is the long break from school. With the holidays on, not even the sweltering heat can curb children from going out and having their share of fun. But the season also makes them prone to infections as germs and bacteria thrive so keeping the children clean becomes imperative.

Being Outdoors

Frolicking in the mud could be your child's idea of a perfect day but requires you to be very careful. Ask any doctor and they'll tell you, the most common cause for infections are dirty hands. So once in the house, the first thing they need to do is wash their hands with a disinfectant soap and follow it

up with a sanitiser. As the incidence of conjunctivitis increases during this season, tell your children to not touch or rub their eyes frequently. Keeping nails trimmed and clean is a must to get rid of the germs that hide under them. Scratching the skin with germ infected nails can lead to skin infection and rashes.

If hitting the pool is your child's favourite hobby nowadays, take extra precautions. Pools and water parks are breeding grounds for germs and places where infections are most easily contracted. Children do swim a lot in summer so it is advisable to use ear plugs, cap and goggles while in the pool. Once out, ensure that they take a shower with a disinfectant body wash or soap.

Inside The House

Children must be bathed once or twice every day while the face can be washed frequently to remove dirt and perspiration. Keeping the hair clean is as essential. Wash it daily if the hair is short or on alternate days if it is longer. While washing hair with shampoo, the scalp should be massaged well and rinsed off with water. But getting the little ones to bathe could well be a task. To make this easier, try making it fun. Throw in toys and put on a little music. You could also entice them with a reward. The heat and excessive sweating also means prickly heat and other skin infections. So make sure you sprinkle a medicated powder and put on light, cotton clothes that allow the skin to breathe. Dirty clothes, socks and shoes, which contain dead skin cells and sweat can lead to a stinky odour and infections such as foot fungus.

As for dental care, who doesn't remember being forced to brush when getting in and out of bed as children? Regular brushing is an essential part of dental hygiene for kids. Pediatrics recommend that by the age of one, every child should have been screened by a dentist at least once. Pre-teens should ideally be brushing at least twice a day to prevent bad breath and tooth decay. It is essential to teach children to brush and floss their teeth properly.

Extra attention is required if you have pets at home. Don't kiss the pet on the mouth as it will encourage your children to do the same. Also, make sure they wash their hands after petting the animals.

New Borns and Toddlers

Just because they are within the safe confines of your house doesn't mean infants are safe from infections. Looking after a baby's hygiene needs can be unnerving but with a little positive attitude and practice you will be a pro in no time. Nappy changing is probably the first thing you'll learn but it can be tricky so know the right way. When changing, use some cotton wool and warm water for cleaning. Make sure every time your child wets the nappy you change it as soon as possible to prevent sore skin and rashes and use an anti-rash cream.

The next step is learning to bathe them right. There is no need to bathe a newborn everyday, every alternate day is fine. Since their skin has a tendency to be dry and sensitive, plain water and a soft wash cloth or cotton wool should be used. Products like soaps, shampoos, talc and moisturisers are not needed in the first few months. Starting with the face, a fresh piece of cotton wool should be used on each eye, then working down the body wash all areas leaving the navel and nappy area until last. Pay attention to drying the skin, especially in and around the skin creases such as the underarms, under the neck and between the fingers and toes. This too should be done using cotton pads.

With inputs from: Dr Rajiv Chhabra, Consultant, Pediatric and Neonatal Intensivist, Artemis Health Institute, Delhi, and Dr Shikha Mahajan, Consultant, Pediatrics, Dr B L Kapur Memorial Hospital, Delhi.