# Effective health and hygiene practices during COVID-19 pandemic

This is a resource for preschool teachers to support them with effective hygiene measures in preschool during the COVID-19 pandemic. For updated information about the NSW Department of Education response to COVID-19 connect to the department [website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/school-safety/novel-coronavirus.html).

Maintaining effective health and hygiene standards is an important way to reduce the risk of acquiring and spreading respiratory infections. [Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/staying-healthy-preventing-infectious-diseases-early-childhood-education-and-care-services) details strategies to prevent many infectious diseases and control their spread. A key concept explained is how germs can spread in education and care services, known as the ‘chain of infection’. Regular handwashing with soap is the single most effective way to reduce the spread of germs that cause respiratory disease.

Be confident in knowing that your preschool already has procedures in place that will help you maintain effective health and hygiene practices such as your ‘dealing with infectious diseases’ and ‘Incident, injury, trauma and illness’ localised procedures. Review and update your current cleaning schedule and handwashing procedure and ensure you communicate this with all families.

## Hygiene practices

Preschools should follow appropriate hygiene practices to reduce the spread of germs that cause respiratory disease. These include:

* support children to wash their hands, using soap and water,
  + on arrival at preschool
  + before and after eating and touching food
  + after blowing noses and coughing
  + after toileting
  + during regular intervals throughout the day.
* consider scheduling a regular time for handwashing for all children and staff within your learning programs and daily activities.
* provide handwashing soap and supervise children during handwashing
* encourage children to cover their mouth with their arm/elbow or a tissue when coughing or sneezing
* discard tissues immediately into a closed bin and clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub as soon as possible
* supervise during meals times and ensure children to not share food
* follow appropriate hygiene practices when preparing and serving food, including use of gloves, tongs and washing hands
* wipe down tables before and after meal times and at increased intervals throughout the day with detergent and water
* display health and hygiene promotional materials that show the best ways to reduce the risk of acquiring and spreading respiratory infections.

### Cleaning the preschool

Keeping the preschool clean, safe and hygienic requires resources and equipment to be cleaned daily. Preschool teams need to consider when cleaning will be completed, and by whom.

Basic steps for effective routine cleaning:

* use detergent and warm water, following the manufacturer’s instructions on how much detergent to use
* vigorously rub the surface to physically remove germs
* rinse the surface with clean water
* dry the surface, if possible in the sun.

You may increase the use of disinfectants during this period as it is unknown if a surface may be contaminated with potentially infectious material. Clean surfaces around you and other high touchpoints at least once a day with an effective disinfectant or disinfectant wipes. Spray equipment such as puzzles, books, wooden blocks and cushions with disinfectant spray, as per the manufacturer’s instructions. Ensure children’s safety at all times.

### Supporting children

Teach children how to wash their hands and distance themselves, empowering them to teach others which in turn supports their sense of agency and sense of control during this difficult time.

Think about how changes to the set-up of the physical environment may affect children, including those taking a break from preschool. Incorporate learning from NSW health about Catch it, bin it, kill it: [health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Influenza/Publications/spread-of-flu.pdf](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Influenza/Publications/spread-of-flu.pdf)

Support children’s play as this helps them to feel connected, valued and accepted and provides opportunities for children to express and work through their feelings.

Remember, to communicate with children, in a sensitive way about what is happening and why. Use books, such as the Hello, I’m a virus, cousins with the Flu and Common Cold. Incorporate fun and catchy song on handwashing into your routine such as:

* The Kiboomers: [Germs for](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaePayB_pC4) kids: wash your hands
* Playschool: [Wash](https://www.abc.net.au/abckids/shows/play-school/covid-19/12114308) your hands

### Adjusting routines for children

During transition times refrain from lining up when children are moving from one area to another. Be mindful of supervision, during transitions, as it may take children longer to move from one place to another. Maintain continuous communication between educators and children and give constant reminders about space and ‘keeping hands to ourselves’.

Separate play areas and limit resources/chairs at the table so only two children play together instead of more. Move tabletop activities outside and utilise indoor/outdoor play when possible with supervision.

Remind children of safe hygiene practices at mealtimes and talk openly to the children about why it is not healthy or safe to share food. Include regular conversations about washing germs away.

### Working with families

Alter the routine so that parents are not gathering at the same time in the afternoon with staggered pick up times, encourage families to sanitise their hands prior to entering the preschool and bring their own pen to sign in/out. Request that only one family member enter the service to collect their child, preventing extra people entering the preschool. Remind families why you’re doing this and reinforce the new procedures you have in place.

Display and send out through social media visuals of correct handwashing procedures at the entrance and near sign on areas, along with information about how you are managing COVID-19. You could develop a video showcasing handwashing procedures with the children and share with families via a digital platform, such as Kinderloop, Seesaw, Dojo, Facebook or through email.

### Looking after yourself

Wear protective equipment when necessary like aprons and disposable gloves. Wash your hands frequently throughout the day and ensure you use hand sanitiser after supporting children or engaging in play experiences.

### References and further reading

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* [NSW Health 2020, COVID-19 (Coronavirus), viewed 26 March 2020](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx)
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* [The Wiggles 2020, The Wiggles: Social Distancing (song), viewed 1 April 2020](https://youtu.be/jUmSiLXesKI)
* [Wallis, N 2020, What to focus on during these early days, viewed 27 March 2020](https://youtu.be/l59Vi04u-3E)
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