

‘Crib Sheet’: Keeping Young Children Safe from Food Poisoning

Anyone can get food poisoning, but babies and toddlers are at especially high risk and once they become infected, young children can have a hard time getting well. Serious complications may develop, resulting in hospitalizations, lifelong health problems, and even death.

This guide from the Partnership for Food Safety Education has tips for parents, grandparents, and baby sitters on ways to reduce the risk of food poisoning in households with small children.

Clean Hands: Soap and Water or Sanitizer?

“Clean hands save lives,” according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but what should you choose for getting kids’ hands clean: handwashing or hand sanitizers?

When done properly, washing hands with warm water and soap is more effective than sanitizers in reducing the number of bacteria and viruses on hands.

Take time to help young children wash hands properly:



- Wet the child’s hands under clean, running water.
- Apply soap.
- The child should rub his or her hands together; you should help if the child is very young. Don’t forget to lather the wrists, up the arms, and in between fingers.
- Lathering should last 20 seconds – about the time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song – twice.
- Rinse hands and then dry thoroughly with a single use paper towel. Use the towel to turn off the faucets.

When soap and water aren’t available, sanitizers that contain at least 60 percent alcohol can be a good choice. But, for sanitizers to work, they have to air dry on the hands instead of being dried off with a towel.

Young children should only use sanitizers with adult supervision, so they won’t get sanitizer in their eyes – or drink it which can be poisonous.

