

Germ Science: Why Handwashing Matters



Everywhere you look there are signs to remind us to wash our hands. How does hand washing make a difference even when your hands look clean? Why not try this experiment to find out.

What You Do:

- 1 . Set it up: This works best if you and your child set up the experiment after a trip to the playground (or other dirt-laden fun) and before they wash hands.
- 2 . Ask your child to “wipe” off his or her hands to get rid of visible dirt.
- 3 . Label two sandwich bags: “Touched” and “Not Touched.”
- 4 . Let your child use the tongs to remove a slice of bread from the wrapped loaf and place in the sandwich bag marked “Not touched.”
- 5 . Let your child take another slice of bread and rub his or her hands thoroughly on both sides of the bread. He or she should put this slice into the bag labelled “Touched.” Before zipping the bag, allow your child to give one to two gentle mists of water into each bag. Zip the bags and tape or place on a shelf, in a closet, or inside a cupboard. Check the bags every few days. Which one grows the most mould first?

What You Need:

- Two or more slices of wheat or dark bread.
(White bread takes longer to grow mould because it has so many preservatives in it, unless, of course, it's homemade!)
- Zipped sandwich bag for each slice of bread
- Tongs
- Water spray

child set up the experiment after a trip to the playground (or other similarly dirt-laden fun) and before they wash hands.

wrapped loaf

The Handwashing Song *(To the Tune of Frere Jacques)*

*Over, under
Over, under
Scrub between
Scrub between
Rinse the tops and bottoms
Rinse the tops and bottoms
Hands are clean!
Hands are clean!*

What's Going On?

Mould will grow on both slices, but much sooner on one slice. Help your child understand that the germs that he or she did not see on the “wiped-off” hands became food for the mould. Would we want to eat those germs? These germs are so easily passed on.

Please remind your children to wash their hands very regularly and hand sanitise when this is not possible. Can your child sing the Handwashing Song while scrubbing hands at the sink? It will keep them scrubbing long enough to get the germs off!