

December is Safe Toys & Gifts and National Hand Washing Awareness Months: Your Eyes Couldn't Agree More

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The easiest way to spread germs and catch a cold is by not keeping your hands clean. Every time you don't wash your hands after eating or using the bathroom, your germs are immediately spread to the next thing you touch – such as the telephone or the door knob. There is, literally, no easier way to pass germs than by not keeping your hands clean. Also, make sure that you wash with warm soapy water rather than cold water, because the heat helps eliminate the bacteria.

TO WASH YOUR HANDS CORRECTLY, USE THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- 1) Wet your hands, try to use warm water if possible.
- 2) Put soap on your hands and rub into a lather – remember to get between your fingers and the backs of your hands!
- 3) Remember to rub for 15-20 seconds – sing (or hum) “Happy Birthday” twice.
- 4) Then rinse your hands under running water.
- 5) Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer.

You should wash your hands before and after using the bathroom, after coughing or sneezing, before cooking or handling food, before eating, after taking out the trash or changing a diaper, after playing with animals or playing outside – or anytime when your hands are noticeably dirty. The main thing to remember is that if your hands are going to go near your eyes, nose or mouth you should wash your hands first. If you feel that you wash your hands a lot during the day consider using hand sanitizer which also kills the bacteria on your hands but isn't as effective as washing your hands.

Now that your hands are clean, make sure the toys you are buying for Christmas aren't going to kill you. What I'm saying is, before making those purchases, remember to consider the safety and age-range of the toys. In 2007 alone, toymakers recalled over 19 million toys worldwide because of safety concerns such as lead paint and small magnets. **In 2005, there were over 200,000 toy-related injuries.**

To prevent injuries, choose toys that are safe for the age of the child. Look for labels to help you judge which toys might not be safe, especially for infants and children under age three. For children of all ages, consider if the toys are suited to their skills and abilities. Even within the child's age range, toys suitable for one child might not be suitable for another child. It's good to keep in mind that younger children, if they're not being watched closely, may play with toys purchased for older children. Here are some guidelines for choosing safe toys for all ages:

- Look for toys that have a solid design and a sturdy construction – toys that won't break, crush, or be pulled apart easily.
- Check to see if the instructions are clear.
- Read the labels to see if there are any fire hazards.
- Look for labels that assure you the toys have passed a safety inspection – ASTM means the toy has met the American Society for Testing and Materials standards.

Protect yourself AND your eyes this holiday season.