



Children's Secretariat
Ministry of Women and Child Affairs & Social Security

Guidelines for COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Measures in Early Childhood Education and Care Services



June 2020

Guidelines for COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Measures in Early Childhood Education and Care Services

This Guideline is applicable for:

- Preschools/Early Childhood Development Centres
- Child Daycare Centres
- Creches in Estates

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Objective of the guideline

This guideline aims to provide risk mitigation measures for early childhood education and care services that would reduce children's exposure to the novel coronavirus which causes COVID-19 disease and restricts its probability of transmission in a preschool and childcare setting.

Early childhood education and care services include preschools, day-care centres and creches in tea estates (hereinafter referred to as ECD centres).

The guideline is aimed as a reference for preschool teachers, childcare workers and administrators. It is also important that parents or other primary caregivers of young children are made aware of the contents of this guideline.

This guideline is prepared in accordance with the guideline bearing reference FHB/CH11/FD/GOSL/09/2020 of 15 June 2020 issued by the Director General of Health Services to the Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs & Social Security.

This guideline acknowledges that preventive measures in early childhood education and care services alone, will not prevent the disease spread or infection. However, adopting these measures and its consistent application will increase vigilance and improve personal and centre hygiene that will ultimately contribute to reducing the spread of COVID-19, as well as some of the other infectious diseases.

This guideline is based on current medical and scientific information. The guideline is fluid and may be updated as we learn more about COVID-19.

This guideline should be read and followed in tandem with all instructions and guidance issued by the health authorities of Sri Lanka.

Procedure to reopen the ECD centres

The reopening of ECD centres will be staggered to allow child daycare centres and creches to open first, followed by preschools. The Government will issue an official announcement of the dates and the sequencing of reopening of ECD centres. Relevant authorities will be made aware of the instructions contained in circulars to that effect. All future actions pertaining to the reopening of preschools should be commensurate with the said circulars.

Provincial and divisional committees will be established under the said circulars to decide on and implement province/division specific particulars to the reopening of ECD centres.

It is essential that a health promotion committee made up of parents of children enrolled in an ECD centre is setup to implement the guidance and instructions issued by the provincial/divisional committees.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus (SARS-CoV-2). Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, anyone can catch COVID-19 and become seriously ill. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

Modes of transmission of virus causing COVID-19

There are primarily two ways in which the virus can be contracted by a person.

1. Direct transmission - People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks. People can catch COVID-19 if they breathe in these droplets from a person infected with the virus.

2. Indirect transmission - The virus can also spread through contaminated objects or surfaces. Droplets expelled by an infected person can land on objects and surfaces around the person such as tables, doorknobs and handrails. People can become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Symptoms of COVID-19

People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported - ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough and tiredness. Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients include aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhea or loss of taste or smell.

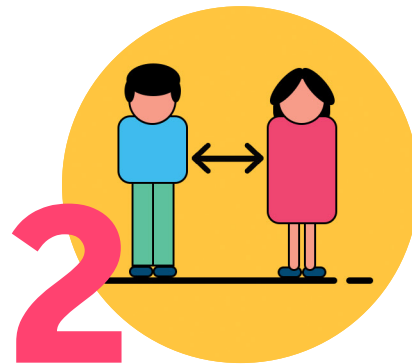
These signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection are similar to the common infections in the respiratory system often experienced by children and older people. It can be difficult to identify COVID-19 infection apart from the other infections in the respiratory system. Therefore, everyone should be vigilant in identifying the symptoms in advance. In order to prevent spread of illnesses which can lead to infection of COVID-19, it is very important to identify infected (or suspected) people quickly so that they can be isolated and cared for.



Three main preventive measures to prevent transmission of COVID-19 are -



Clean your hands often



Ensure a physical distance of at least 1-2 metres from others



Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or bent elbow at all times

1. Key considerations

1.1 For the management and teachers

- The central government will issue the necessary guidelines and circulars on the reopening of ECD centres. Guided by these instruments, provincial or divisional committees will be empowered to formulate criteria and timelines on preparing, reopening and continuing the functioning of ECD centres.
- In the event of provincial or zonal health authorities or the provincial/divisional committees declaring a specific geographic area as prone to high risk of spread of COVID-19, ECD centres in such areas shall not recommence their operations until such permission is granted.
- Before an ECD centre can recommence their operations, the centre's administrator or owner must complete the Assurance Form issued by the Ministry of Health (**see annex 1**). While retaining a copy of this form for their own records, the owner/administrator must submit the original completed form to the area's Medical Officer of Health (MOH) with copies to the relevant provincial preschool authority, bureau or unit, and the responsible officer at the local government authority (municipal council, urban council or pradeshiya sabha). In submitting this Assurance Form, the owner/administrator of the centre is committing themselves to strictly adhere to the stipulations in this guideline and other health advisories.
- Before an ECD centre is to reopen, its owner/administrator/caretaker must try to fulfil the criteria listed in the checklist (**see annex 2**), as much as is practical. Field officers will assess and verify a centre's compliance against the set criteria.
- In everyday close interactions with children under their care, teachers and caregivers in an ECD centre shall pay close attention to applying all infection prevention and control measures and should maintain good levels of awareness on the various guidelines and circulars issued by the relevant authorities. They also have an obligation to raise awareness of other staff members in an ECD centre as well as parents on these instruments.
- Teachers and caretakers are encouraged to setup messaging groups (using WhatsApp or Viber) to quickly and reliably broadcast updates and messages to keep parents and staff informed of the actions they are taking at their centre.
- Each ECD centre is requested to setup a Health Promotion Committee with the participation of parents of enrolled children to allow for enacting these guidelines more effectively.

1.2 For parents

- Parents/carers of children with complex medical needs (including but not limited to underlying respiratory and cardiovascular conditions) should seek advice from the child's medical/health practitioner to support informed risk assessment and decision making regarding the suitability of continuing education and care at this time.
- Parents are encouraged to play an active role in the ECD centre's health promotion committee.

2. Preparing ECD centres for reopening

2.1 Maintaining physical distancing

- Formulate a system of scheduling learning or care sessions for different age groups, at different times of the day or the week to allow for maintaining appropriate physical distancing (3–6 feet or 1–2 meters between each other) at all possible times. It is recommended to cluster the same group of students to be present at a given time and day and assign the same adult caregiver to this group to be vigilant over the children's health and wellbeing.
- Consider the setup of rooms, hygienic conditions and the placement of the activities to allow for physical distancing as much as is practical.

2.2 Setting up safe water, sanitation and hygienic conditions

- Install hand washing facilities at the main entrance(s) to the ECD centre, adjoining the toilet(s) or bathroom(s) or next to any other relevant place within the centre. It is important to ensure that such facilities are age appropriate and can be used at will.
- Maintain a sufficient stock of sanitation items (bar or liquid soap, hand sanitizer and cleaning tools) and trash bins (foot pedal operated bins are recommended to minimize surface contact).
- Create a cleaning and disinfection schedule and a list of the spaces and items to be cleaned regularly in the ECD centre. Appoint a teacher or a caregiver to supervise frequent and daily cleaning of toilets.
- Ensure that the staff in the ECD centre has a sufficient stock of disposable or reusable face masks and that they know how to safely wear and dispose them.
- Ensure the quality and sufficiency of the water supply to the ECD centre (**see annex 3 for more information**).

2.3 Emergency preparedness

- Compile a list of telephone numbers of personnel and agencies to contact in an emergency and put it up in a visible and easily accessible place within the ECD centre.
- Create a plan of action to guide you on what to do if a child or a staff member becomes sick while they are in the ECD centre. Identify a space that can be used to isolate children and staff who become sick until they can be sent home or receive medical care.
- Communicate to staff, parents and children the steps you are taking to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the ECD centre through the display of posters and distribution of handbills.
- On the first day of reopening, conduct an age-appropriate hands-on orientation to children of the various new safety and health measures in place at the ECD centre.

3. Measures for ensuring safe operations of ECD centres

3.1 Promoting hand hygiene (See annex 4 for instructions on washing hands properly)

- Encourage children, teachers and carers to wash their hands using running water during or after any of the following acts:

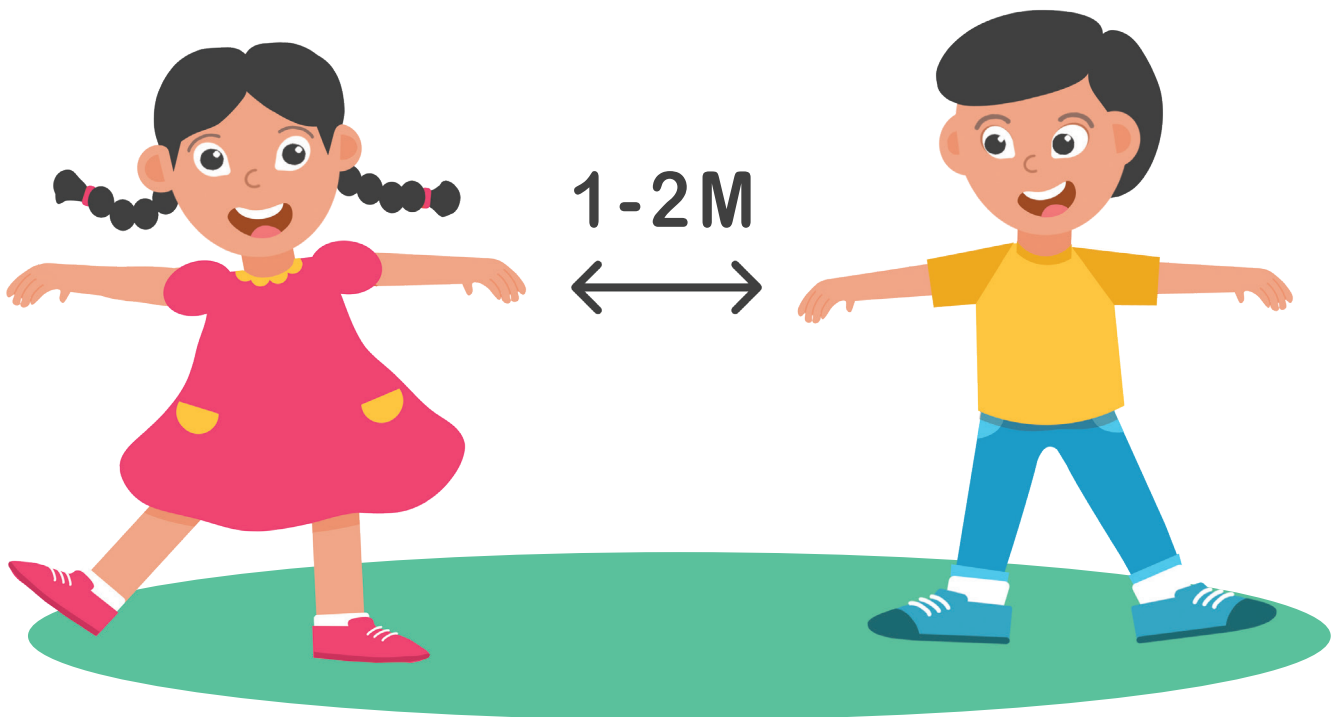


- When entering the ECD centre
- Before and after learning or play activities
- Before and after eating or handling food, or feeding children
- After using the toilet or helping a child use the toilet
- Whenever hands are visibly dirty

- Make children wash their hands with soap and water regularly and thoroughly; this means for at least 20 seconds (tell children to sing the happy birthday song two times while washing their hands, since it takes 20 seconds).
- If there is a line, keep a minimum of 1 metre distance between lined up people.
- Develop a way to track hand washing and reward children for frequent/timely hand washing.

3.2 Maintaining physical distancing

- Space desks and chairs in the classroom enabling children to sit 3-6 feet or 1-2 meters apart from each other.
- Be conscious about maintaining appropriate physical distancing 3-6 feet or 1-2 meters at all times, as much as is practical. Limit face-to-face activities of children to control further spread of the virus.
- Have children sit further apart from one another, have them practice stretching their arms out or 'flap their wings', they should keep enough space to not touch their friends.
- Look at the spacing of sleeping mats, mattresses, cots and highchairs used in child day care centres, keeping them well apart, at a minimum of 3-6 feet or 1-2 meters.



3.3 Promoting respiratory hygiene

- Educate children to avoid touching their face, eyes or mouth.
- Educate and encourage children to exercise good respiratory hygiene by covering their mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing. Any used tissues should be disposed immediately in a closed trash bin and hands should be washed with soap.
- All centre staff, including administrators, teachers and caretakers, are always advised to wear a face mask while they are inside the centre.



3.4 Improving sanitation and hygiene of the centre

- Wash play items and toys, including washable plush toys, as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based cleaning and disinfection solution containing at least 70% alcohol. Avoid using toys or rotation of toys that are not possible to be cleaned in this way.
- If possible, wash items with warm water and dry items completely. The same applies to clothing items such as bedsheets, covers, pillowcases and mats.

- Remember to store alcohol-based cleaning products out of reach of children.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops, toilet training potties, desks, chairs, cubbies and playground structures using wet rags and an alcohol-based cleaning and disinfection solution containing at least 70% alcohol, daily and regularly.
- If no safety and security-related concerns exist and where possible, keep windows in your building open during the day to promote air flow.
- Use a cleaning and disinfection solution with 0.5% Sodium Hypochlorite to disinfect floors in the ECD centre (**see annex 5 for more information**).

3.5 Ensuring personal wellbeing

- All unwell staff and children are to be actively encouraged to stay home and inform the management.
- If a child is sick, request parents not to send them until they recover completely.
- Assign a dedicated telephone number for staff and children to inform the centre management about any absences due to illness. This is important for record keeping.

3.6 Mealtimes

- Encourage children, teachers and other carers to use their own vessel for drinking water (brought from home or filled at the centre from a safe water supply).
- Allow to observe physical distancing during mealtimes if you have all children eating at the same time. If space is limited, consider staggered timings for meals.
- Discourage sharing plates, cutlery, vessels, cups or glasses.
- Ensure the highest hygiene practices among food handlers.

- Sharing of food should be actively monitored and discouraged.
- Note that some children will require assistance with feeding. Make sure that teachers or carers wash their hands with soap and water before and after handling food or feeding children.

3.7 Facilitating learning activities

The learning space

- Consider the setup of your room and the placement of the activities. For table activities, set up the activity only at each end of the table.
- Set up more individual activities throughout the room.
- Try to space chairs around tables well apart, at a minimum of 1-2 metres.

Learning activities

- Consider a shortened daily schedule for the centre until normalcy returns to everyday life. Avoid the urge to catch up on the lost learning days as soon as possible.
- Limit morning time assemblies or other observances to avoid children crowding in confined spaces.
- Wherever possible (e.g. weather dependent) and where you have enough staffing for adequate supervision, consider operating an indoor/outdoor programme for the full day/session. This naturally provides for more space for the children and the setup of more activities for children to engage in.
- If you are not able to run an indoor/outdoor programme, consider spending more time outdoors, with the placement of some activities in the outdoor space. A greater range of activities will encourage children to spread out more broadly.
- Rather than having group times where everyone is sitting on a mat or the floor, consider using informal opportunities to engage with the children/read books/do story telling with one or two children at a time throughout the day.
- For younger children, particularly consider the rotation of toys more often and increase the frequency of cleaning toys.
- Be mindful of children's individual needs and making too many changes to their routines all at once.
- To ensure continuity of learning, plan for ways to keep children engaged in learning experiences if they are expected to be at home for long periods of time.

Providing psycho-social support for children

- The changes being made to their learning or caring space, homes and schedules would bring stress to some children. Children respond to stress in many ways. Common stress reactions experienced by children many include sleep disorders, headaches, bowel or bladder problems, nervousness, irritability and phobias etc.
- Respond to your child's reactions in a supportive way, listen to their concerns and give them extra love and attention, reassuring them.
- If possible, make opportunities for the child to play and relax.



3.8 General instructions

- Put in place a drop-off and pick-up protocol at the centre to limit direct contact between parents/ carers and staff and adhere to physical distancing recommendations.
- Ask parents or caregivers of children to assign one and the same person to drop-off and pick-up children from the ECD centre, if possible. This should not be an elderly person or those with pre-existing medical conditions.
- If holding meetings with parents or other caregivers are necessary, require everyone to wear face masks, make available handwashing facilities and arrange seating in an indoor space to allow for appropriate physical distancing of 1-2 meters apart.
- Allow children to attend the centre in clothing of their choice, without enforcing the requirement to wear a uniform.
- Ask staff to wear lightweight and launderable clothing and avoid wearing unnecessary adornments (When babies or toddlers are being washed, fed, carried or comforted by their caregivers, encourage them to wear a long-sleeved top and tie-up their long hair for their own safety).
- Cancel or postpone special events, such as concerts, birthday celebrations, festivals and holiday events at the centre.
- Excursions should be discouraged. Public playground equipment should not be used.
- Limit daily activities which can increase the potential for disease transmission and identify creative, alternative activities to keep children engaged.
- Create block schedules or keep students separated by age or class to keep smaller groups of students together and limit mixing during physical activities, art and music sessions.
- Reduce the number of visitors to the absolute minimum. Exclude people from entering your facilities who are in the high-risk category for COVID-19, including:
 1. The elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions
 2. Those who have returned from overseas in the last 14 days
 3. Those with fever or symptoms of acute respiratory infection (e.g. cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath) symptoms

3.9 Daily logs and records to be maintained in the centre

- Daily attendance register of children
- Daily attendance register of teachers, caregivers and centre staff
- Visitors log
- Daily cleaning and disinfection schedule
- All other standard logs and records currently maintained in the centre (such as the logbook)

3.10 Transportation of children

- Parents and caregivers are encouraged to use their private vehicles, if possible, to transport their children to and from the centre.
- If the mode of transport is a school van or public transport services, encourage parents to pay attention as to whether transportation takes place in accordance with health advice.

3.11 Waste management

- Keep labelled or colour coded bins for food waste, paper and other non-degradable waste (glass, metal, plastic and polythene).
- Use pedal-operated trash bins with liners whenever possible and, if not, use closed bins.
- Put tissues used for coughing or sneezing into a closed bin and wash hands with soap immediately.
- Collect waste in these bins and dispose of safely on-site or hand over to the waste collection trucks of the local authority.
- For on-site waste disposal (for paper and tissue), where available, pit burning can be used with the aid of fuel drops, such as kerosene, applying all safety measures for children and staff.

3.12 Responsibilities of parents

Ask the parents/carers to:

- Confirm that the child does not have fever, shortness of breath or cough. If the child is sick request parents not to send them until they recover completely.
- Adhere to the recommended drop-off and pick-up protocols of the centre.
- Dress children in lightweight and launderable clothing. Ask parents not to accessorise children with necklaces, bangles, ribbons and bows etc.
- Comb the child's hair properly to prevent locks from resting on the face or forehead. It will prevent the child from frequently touching their face or hair.
- Place an extra set of clothing in a tightly sealed bag inside the child's school bag.
- Send homemade food or snacks to the centre, have the leftovers taken back home and have the lunchboxes properly washed using soap and water at home.
- Wipe clean the school bag, books (if appropriate) or other utensils with soap or disinfectant using a wet rag or a sponge.

- Limit or avoid visits to crowded places such as supermarkets, bookshops, shopping malls and restaurants in transit to and from the centre.
- Bathe the child and themselves on reaching home and change into a new set of clothes before associating with other members of the household.
- Converse with children on their time spent at the centre and whether they observed anyone being sick with a fever, cold or cough.

3.13 Managing an unwell child or staff member

If a child or a staff member is observed experiencing compatible symptoms with COVID-19, initiate action according to your emergency preparedness plan (please see section 2.3 above):

- Seek assistance from hotline 1999.
- Isolate the child or the staff member in the isolation room or space.
- When separating the child or the staff member from the others in the centre, be mindful and intentional to not create any stigma or fear among others.
- If the teacher or the caregiver is suffering from any acute respiratory infection, close the centre unless a replacement teacher is available.
- Maintain up-to-date contact details of the Medical Officer, Public Health Inspector, Midwife, nearest hospital and the parents or guardians of all children, for easy reference.
- Alternatively, transfer the child or staff member to the nearest government hospital by ambulance.
- Suwasariya ambulance service can be contacted by dialling 1990.
- In such an event, be responsible to safeguard the privacy of the child, the staff member or their families.
- Alert the local Medical Officer of Health (MOH) about large increases in child and staff absenteeism due to flu-like illnesses.

Annexes

Annex 1 - Assurance form

I being the owner/
Director/Manager of the business establishment namely
..... bearing Business Registration Number
..... situated at
..... within the Medical Officer of Health

area of hereby assure that I will adhere to the legal provisions applicable to prevent and control of the infectious and contagious diseases and the guidelines, instructions and the circulars issued by the Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services from time to time on measures to be adopted in functioning the said businesses/establishment to prevent and control the Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19). I am aware that action can be taken against me under any applicable legal provisions of the existing legislation/legislations, in the event of any breach of such legal provisions by me or any employee of my establishment.

Signature :

National Identity card Number :

Date :

Note: You are required to fill the provided Assurance form, indicating compliance with the instructions given. The original of the Assurance form should be submitted to the area Medical Officer of Health. A copy of the same should be sent to the local government authority (municipal council/urban council/pradeshiya sabha) and another copy should be kept with you. The owner/employer/manager of the organization/premises is responsible to ensure that the above guidelines are strictly adhered to.

(This can be downloaded from the website of the Ministry of Health

http://www.health.gov.lk/moh_final/english/public/elfinder/files/feturesArtical/2020/46/Assurance%20form_English.pdf)

Annex 2 - Checklist for the administrators, teachers, caregivers and staff of ECD centres

	Item	Checked
1.	<p>Prior to the reopening of the centre, confirm that the below facilities or items are available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Water and soap can be provided to students, staff and other members of staff for hand washing - at least 1 tap is available for 50 children b) One trash bin with a lid (pedal-operated if possible) in each room sufficient in size to discard used tissues c) Posters or notices displayed to raise awareness among children and staff on respiratory hygiene d) An emergency response plan to guide actions if a child or a staff member is observed to experiencing compatible symptoms with COVID-19 e) A stock of face masks to use in an emergency f) A sufficient stock of personal protective equipment (such as masks and gloves) for cleaning staff g) Sufficient stocks of disinfectants and bleaching agents to disinfect toilets, rooms and other frequently used spaces 	
2.	<p>Promote and demonstrate good hygiene practices, including hand washing by making available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Soap and a safe water supply at hand washing stations b) Hand sanitizer 	
3.	<p>Clean and disinfect the centre building, rooms and importantly, toilets and washing/sanitary facilities at least twice a day using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Sodium Hypochlorite at a recommended concentration of 0.5% on most surfaces b) Isopropyl alcohol at a recommended concentration of 70% for personal sanitation and on small items 	
4.	Keep the windows open to improve air flow, avoid the use of air conditioners	
5.	Identify a dedicated space for isolation of a child or a staff member	
6.	Develop a system to safely dispose daily waste	
7.	Compile up-to-date contact details of the Medical Officer, Public Health Inspector, Midwife, nearest hospital and the parents or guardians of all children, for easy reference.	

Annex 3 - Quality and sufficiency of the water supply to the ECD centre

- Ensure that water is available in schools in adequate quantity. Priority for the water use should be given for hygiene practices (handwashing) and environmental cleaning.
- Consider measures for additional water storage if required at the centre premises.
- Ensure water safety with safe storage of treated water in regularly cleaned and covered containers in the centre.
- Clean drinking water storage containers and taps regularly with disinfectants.
- Clean and disinfect drinking water bottles/cups/glasses at the end of each day at home by parents/carers and involve children in the process (when and where possible).

Annex 4 - How to wash your hands properly?

0



Wet hands with water

1



Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces

2



Rub hands palm to palm

3



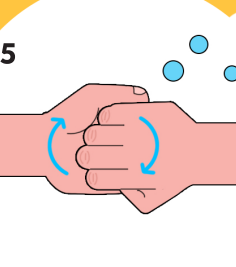
Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa

4



Palm to palm with fingers interlaced

5



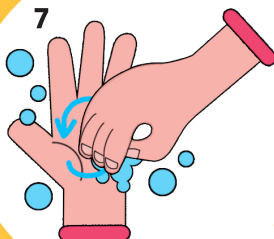
Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked

6



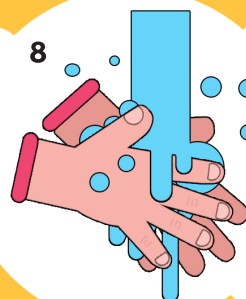
Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa

7



Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa

8



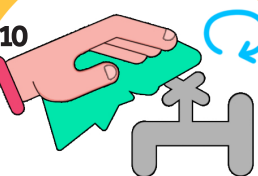
Rinse hands with water

9



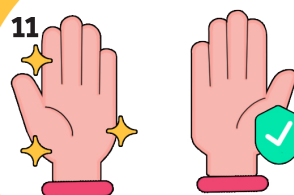
Dry hands thoroughly with a single use towel or tissue

10



Use towel to turn off faucet

11



Your hands are now safe

Annex 5 - How to disinfect properly?

- Door/window handles - wipe with 70% ethanol solution
- Other metal surfaces - wipe with 70% ethanol solution
- Non-metal surfaces - wipe with 0.1% hypochlorite solution
- Handrails/dining tables - wipe with 70% ethanol solution
- Learning and teaching tools and instruments - wipe with 70% ethanol solution
- Reusable equipment - wipe with 70% ethanol solution
- Toilets/bathrooms - wipe with 0.5% hypochlorite solution
- Cleaning tools (mops/trash bins) - wipe with 0.1% hypochlorite solution and dry well in direct sunlight
- Infectious waste - dig a pit in a separate place and burn (where possible)

Use a cloth or wipe which is soaked in the disinfectant to clean the different surfaces listed above.

Hypochlorite disinfectant solutions can be prepared using bleach powder containing 35% available chlorine.

Use plastic containers for mixing and storing bleach solutions as metal containers are corroded rapidly and also affect the bleach.

Make new strong hypochlorite solution every day. Throw away any leftover solution from the day before.

Preparation of 0.5% hypochlorite solution

To make a 0.5% hypochlorite solution from bleach powder containing 35% available chlorine, dissolve 15 grams of bleach powder in 1 liter of water. Strain any non-soluble residue.

Preparation of 0.1% hypochlorite solution

To make a 0.1% hypochlorite solution from bleach powder containing 35% available chlorine, dissolve 3 grams of bleach powder in 1 liter of water. Strain any non-soluble residue.



Children's Secretariat
Ministry of Women and Child Affairs & Social Security

unicef 

for every child

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ஒவ்வொரு சிறுவர்களுக்காகவும்



UK Government



Unilever