

Meera and Radha learn about washing hands

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“Amma! Amma!! I am bored! What shall we do next?” asked Meera. She and her younger sister Radha had been off from school for almost 3 weeks now. Not getting to meet their friends, playing in the park, going to shop or to a theater, they are looking for new fun activities everyday.

“Well girls, I am making laddus right now: you can help!” said Mala. All her friends were complaining about managing the kids at home, but she was secretly enjoying being away from work and spending time with her daughters.

“Amma, I’ll help!” said Radha eagerly. “But, you should wash your hands first before helping Amma in the kitchen” reminded Meera.

“But my hands are clean! I wasn’t playing in the mud!” Radha cried. Mala noticed the girls had paint and glitter on their hands from their art project. “I see paint and glitter on your hands. We don’t want to eat painted laddus! Please go wash your hands.” Mala insisted.



Both the girls rushed to the bathroom and came back quickly.

Too quickly thought Mala, was that 20 secs each?

“Amma! Meera didn’t use soap!” Radha complained.

“But I washed my hands clean, see Amma no paint or glitter!”, pleaded Meera.

Mala decided to use this opportunity to explain to them the importance of soap and handwashing. “I can see that there is no glitter on your hands but coronaviruses are very very tiny: we cannot see them! When you touch a surface that has viruses, they get on to your hands. Then, when you touch your mouth or nose, they can get into your body and make you sick. Soap destroys the outer layer of these viruses. So it’s important to wash your hands with soap for 20 secs like Appa taught you.” explained Mala.

Radha got onto her tiny stool in the kitchen so that she could reach the counter and started helping Mala with laddus. Meera went and washed her hands with soap this time, and then decided to have a serious talk with Appa about washing hands, soap and viruses.



That evening, Meera decided to share her newly gained knowledge with Radha while they were getting ready to eat. “Here is how you need to wash your hands. Remember to make lots of foam while rubbing hands for at least 20 secs, that is as long as it takes to sing the ‘Happy Birthday’ song twice. That will wash away the dirt and destroy the viruses. Use a towel to dry.”

Obviously, there were more questions over dinner.

“But Appa, remember last summer when there was no water in our taps for weeks, we had to store water in large drums all over the house?” “What do we do if that happens again?” asked Radha.



Appa replied “If you need to save water, you can use two bowls of water. First one to wet your hands, then use soap to lather up while rubbing for 20 secs, the second bowl to rinse your hands, and then use a towel to wipe your hands as usual.”

“Amma, I learnt about Tippytap in school, that gives water like a tap! Ajay said some NGO Aunty came to set it up in his building near the common tap when they had no water. He said that it’s a cheap system for everyone in the building to wash their hands safely! Maybe we can have one of those in our building too.” suggested Meera.

The family also discussed when they should wash their hands. Meera had an idea for their next painting session—”Let’s make a list of when to wash your hands for the house!”



Here's what the girls came up with:

When do you need to wash your hands?

Before and after preparing food

Before eating food

Before and after using the bathroom

After sneezing, blowing your nose, coughing

After touching an animal, its food and waste

After touching garbage

After touching surfaces that might have been touched by others
(e.g., handrails, doorknobs, doorbells, delivery packages, cash)

When your hands are dirty

When you come back home from outside

“It's a helpful checklist for everyone else too!” said Mala.

“Let's take a picture and share it with our friends and family! ”

These are meant to portray typical scenarios and contextualise the information we provide. Necessarily this simplifies the content. Please make sure that you go through the accompanying documents on the website for scientific accuracy.

