

Wash well – and don't forget the lid: how to clean your reusable water bottle

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do you drink enough water?
- Do you own and use a water bottle? How often do you clean it?
- Why do you think using water bottles may not be healthy?

2 Key words

a. Find the key words (marked in bold) in the article. Then circle the correct definition.

1. **antibacterial**

- a. containing bacteria
- b. designed to kill bacteria

2. **bacteria**

- a. very small organisms that can cause illness
- b. small plants that grow in wet places

3. **bleach**

- a. a type of bacteria
- b. a chemical for cleaning

4. **dishwasher**

- a. a machine that cleans dishes
- b. a person who cleans dishes in a restaurant

5. **micro-organisms**

- a. small pieces of plastic
- b. very small living things

Wash well – and don't forget the lid: how to clean your reusable water bottle

Level 1: Elementary

6. **reinfect**

- a. to recover from an illness
- b. to get ill again after recovering

7. **reusable**

- a. you can use something again and again
- b. you can only use something once

8. **soap bubbles**

- a. pieces of soap that you use for washing your hands
- b. small balls you make when you use soap and water

b. **Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.**

1. These plastic pots are _____, so don't throw them away.
2. Add _____ to your wash to make your T-shirts white again.
3. Most children love playing with _____ in the bath.
4. _____ in food or drinks can cause stomach problems.
5. A single drop of water from a lake or river can contain millions of _____.
6. Most gyms and health centres provide _____ hand gel at the entrance.
7. Doctors say you should change your toothbrush after you are ill, so you don't _____ yourself.
8. I usually wash big pans by hand because they are too big to go in the _____.

Wash well – and don't forget the lid: how to clean your reusable water bottle

Level 1: Elementary

Water bottles are the 'perfect environment for bacteria to grow' – as we've seen from the horror pics on social media. Follow these steps to stay clean

Sarah Sloat

05 January, 2026

- 1 **Reusable** water bottles are very popular. But many people don't know how to clean them. "The water bottle is perfect for **bacteria** to grow," says Kelly Reynolds at the University of Arizona. Here's what Reynolds recommends.
- 2 **Wash your hands – and clean your phone:**
First, you should wash your hands because it's your hands that probably contain the bacteria. You should also clean your phone every week, using soap and water. Studies show that about 68 per cent of phones have bacteria on them.
- 3 **Wash the bottle with soap, bleach or vinegar:**
You should clean the bottle in the sink or in the **dishwasher**, says Reynolds. Fill the sink with water, add soap, **bleach** or vinegar and leave it for a minute or two. Then rinse your bottle with clean water. Note: never mix bleach with any other product.
- 4 **Hot water can be better than cold:**
Hot water is good because it creates **soap bubbles**, which help to clean things. For very dirty bottles, a quick prewash with cold water is also a good idea.

5 **Wash regularly:**

Wash your water bottle every day. This is important if you leave it in a hot environment such as your car because bacteria grow more quickly in warm places.

6 **If you can see or smell something, it's too late:**

Bacteria cause biofilm to develop. Biofilm produces a bad smell and taste. It contains **micro-organisms**, and it can make you ill, says Reynolds.

7 **Choose metal or glass bottles:**

Metal and glass water bottles are better than plastic ones because they are **antibacterial**. This means they can stop bacteria from growing.

8 **What happens if you don't clean your water bottle?**

Bacteria can easily grow in a water bottle. Reynolds recently tested the water in people's water bottles and found that about half of them contained bacteria and 10 per cent contained E. coli. Drinking water that contains E. coli can make you very ill. It's also important to clean your water bottle when you are ill, because you can **reinfect** yourself, says Reynolds.

© Guardian News and Media 2026

First published in *The Guardian*, 05/01/2026

Wash well – and don't forget the lid: how to clean your reusable water bottle

Level 1: Elementary

3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and write T (True) or F (False).

According to the article ...

1. ... you should wash your hands before you wash your water bottle. _____
2. ... it's a good idea to mix bleach with vinegar. _____
3. ... hot water is recommended because it produces more soap bubbles. _____
4. ... plastic water bottles are safer than metal or glass ones. _____
5. ... you should clean your water bottle after recovering from an illness, so you don't get ill again. _____

4 Key language

a. Complete the table with a prefix from the box.

re

micro

anti

pre

bio

non

multi

Meaning	Prefix
again	1. _____
against; opposing	2. _____
before	3. _____
life; living	4. _____
many	5. _____
not; without	6. _____
very small; tiny	7. _____

Wash well – and don't forget the lid: how to clean your reusable water bottle

Level 1: Elementary

b. Complete the sentences with the word in brackets and a suitable prefix.

1. A small amount of soil can contain billions of different _____ (organisms).
2. Our local supermarket sells _____ (usable) bags to reduce plastic waste.
3. This software contains _____ (virus) protection for your computer.
4. This _____ (purpose) cleaner is for the kitchen and bathroom.
5. If your clothes are very dirty, you should _____ (wash) them first and then wash them at a high temperature.
6. My flight is a(n) _____ (stop), 14-hour direct flight from Tokyo to London.
7. _____ (film) is a type of bacteria that can grow in water bottles.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Will you clean your water bottle differently after reading this article? Why or why not?
- Do you think most people know that dirty water bottles can make you ill? Why or why not?

6 In your own words

a. Work in pairs or small groups to create an informative poster about water bottle hygiene for your school, gym or workplace.

Your poster should include:

- an interesting title
- reasons why cleaning your water bottle is important
- tips on how to clean a water bottle properly
- a warning section about what to avoid

Wash well – and don't forget the lid: how to clean your reusable water bottle

Level 1: Elementary

Remember to use modals of obligation (*must/should/have to*) and prohibition (*mustn't*) and imperatives (*wash, dry, rinse*, etc) for giving instructions.

- b. Present your poster to the class and explain the information you have included.