

Hand Hygiene at School-

Hand washing and hand sanitizing

What is Hand Hygiene?

Hand hygiene refers to removing germs - bacteria and viruses from our hands. These germs can make us sick when we touch our mouth, eyes, nose or an open sore.

Hand hygiene can be done by either:

- ✓ Hand washing with soap and water or
- ✓ using a hand sanitizer.

Why is hand hygiene so important at school?

Removing bacteria and viruses from our hands is an important way to prevent the spread of illness. The spread of germs that cause the flu (influenza virus), the common cold (rhinovirus) and diarrhea and vomiting (norovirus) can all be reduced with good hand hygiene.

Reducing the spread of illness in schools helps to keep children in class so they can continue to learn.

Hand hygiene is important:

- ✓ After using the washroom.
- ✓ After coughing or sneezing
- ✓ Before eating snacks or lunch.
- ✓ After touching animals.
- ✓ When hands look dirty- especially after recess or gym

How does hand washing remove germs?

The soap once lathered, loosens the dirt and germs present on our hands, the rubbing of our hands during hand washing lifts the dirt and germs off our hands and into the soap lather. The running water rinses the trapped dirt and germs away.

How do hand sanitizers remove germs?

Hand sanitizers work by killing the germs on our hands. All hand sanitizers are not created equal. Hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol are recommended for use. Hand sanitizers with other active ingredients may not be effective against certain viruses including rhinovirus and norovirus.

Schools and alcohol hand sanitizers - Things to consider:

In schools, hand sanitizers should be used with adult supervision. Alcohol is flammable at the concentrations found in hand sanitizers and drinking of this product by children poses a poisoning risk.

The decision: hand wash or hand sanitize?

Both hand washing and hand sanitizing can effectively reduce the germs on our hands when used properly.

- If dirt, grease or food are on our hands, it is important to use soap and water to remove them.
- If our hands appear clean, then an alcohol hand sanitizer is appropriate. The effectiveness of alcohol hand sanitizers is significantly reduced if the hands are visibly dirty.

In schools, hand washing should be promoted as the usual first choice.

Role of the principal and teaching staff in good hand hygiene:

- School staff can make sure that hand wash facilities are in good working order and stocked with soap and paper towels or air hand dryers.
- Having a supply of alcohol hand sanitizer available in the classroom to be used under adult supervision can be an addition to a hand hygiene program.
- Teachers can make sure there is time for hand hygiene at appropriate times in the day.
- Teachers, as always, can be positive role models for children and can lead the way in good hand hygiene in the classroom.

Role of public health staff:

Public health nurses and public health inspectors can assist classroom teachers by providing instructional materials and may be able to assist in providing instruction to staff or students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

References:

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website. Public Information Hand Washing. Accessed from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/pubhealth/handwashing/handwashing_mn.html

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