

Health Trends

Hand Washing Study Reveals Many Preschoolers Don't Know When And How To Wash

(NAPSA)—With cold and flu season in full swing, parents need a proven line of defense against germs.

According to the American Public Health Association (APHA), the best way to combat the spread of colds and flu is frequent and proper hand washing. Think your kids already know how and when to wash their hands? Think again.

A recent study of 133 preschoolers in Head Start centers around the country showed only one in four knew they should wash their hands after using the bathroom. And, most did not know all the other times during the day they should be washing. But the encouraging news is when these children participated in a lesson about germs and hand washing, their retention and recognition of when to wash greatly improved.

Sponsored by Softsoap®, the study set out to learn what children knew about hand washing hygiene and germs before and after participating in a kid-friendly educational program. Head Start teachers used fun materials and techniques from the Softsoap® “Lather Up For Good Health™” program—already a part of the curriculum at many schools nationwide—which teaches children what germs are, how to get rid of them, and how and when to wash.

“The simple act of washing hands can have a huge effect on children’s health,” says Barbara J. Hatcher, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.N., director of scientific and professional affairs for the APHA, who worked on the study. “Even really young children can help keep themselves healthy. This study showed that children as young as three can be taught how and when to wash their hands.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control National Center for Health Statistics, a little more than one-third of the population as a whole suffers from the flu annually but almost half of children under age five get the flu each year.



A recent study showed that when preschoolers were taught the importance of eliminating germs through proper hand washing they began to wash more frequently and effectively.

“The most important thing moms and dads can do is to practice what they preach,” says Dr. Hatcher. “Make sure your kids see you washing your hands properly and frequently throughout the day.”

Need a refresher? Experts recommend everyone use running water and soap—adults can use a liquid soap or a bar soap, but kids should use a liquid soap because it’s easier for little hands to manage. Generate a lather and make sure to really scrub in between fingers and under the nails.

Of course, as important as knowing how to wash is knowing when to wash. Make sure kids know to wash before eating or helping to prepare food and after being outside, using the bathroom, playing with pets, sneezing, coughing or blowing their noses.

In the study, teachers used a variety of materials to make learning about germs and hand washing fun. Techniques included coloring pages, reminder posters for the bathroom and fun tips like singing the ABC song while washing (it takes about 20 seconds to sing, the same amount of time experts recommend both kids and adults spend at the sink).

Parents and teachers can get additional tips about hand washing as well as download the materials used so successfully in the study by visiting www.latherupforgoodhealth.com.