

[IMAGE]

## Washing to Wellness

One of the best methods for avoiding the spread of germs and infections is handwashing. Yet handwashing rates in schools are low: Research has indicated that only a quarter of middle- and high-school girls wash their hands with soap after visiting the bathroom; less than 10% of boys appear to do the same.

The purpose of a recent study in the *American Journal of Infection Control* was to evaluate the effectiveness of a handwashing campaign on absenteeism rates in five elementary schools. Two "test" classrooms and two "control" classrooms were included from each school. Only test classrooms completed a one-hour educational class on germ-spreading and handwashing techniques and received a supply of hand sanitizer. Data on absences for nearly 300 children were tallied over three months.

Children using the hand sanitizer were 50% less likely to be absent than children who did not receive sanitizer and handwashing education. Also, absences were decreased in 23 of 27 months for the handwashing groups. Researchers estimated that the handwashing education saved each school approximately \$24,000 per year in the form of time saved by teachers (preparing take-home and remedial work).

Schools, similar to hospitals, are areas prone to the transmission of microorganisms because of the high number of people in a small area and the sharing of objects. Teach your children about the importance of handwashing, and provide them the means to do so to reduce their number of sick days this year.

### *Reference:*

Guinan M, McGuckin M, Ali Y. The effect of a comprehensive handwashing program on absenteeism in elementary schools. *American Journal of Infection Control* 2002;30(4), pp. 217-220.

For more pediatric health information, go to <http://www.chiroweb.com/tyh/childhood.html>.

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