

Teachers report U of I handwashing lessons in schools help students keep hands clean

AT A GLANCE

Short hands-on handwashing lessons taught by University of Idaho Extension educators across the state keep students washing hands long into the school year.

The Situation

Illness accounts for the largest portion of out of school absences in the U.S. Handwashing plays a vital role keeping children healthy and reducing the spread of illness. Idaho elementary teachers know that handwashing will keep their classrooms healthier but don't have the time or resources to teach handwashing effectively in their classrooms. Many elementary schools no longer have a school nurse and many school nurses face time constraints and limited resources as well. Teachers have asked University of Idaho Extension educators to teach proper handwashing methods and when it is important for students to wash their hands.

Our Response

UI Extension educators have been teaching handwashing in classrooms across the state for several years. They use a "discuss then apply" approach with classes to teach about proper handwashing methods then let children practice by washing their hands. To help illustrate the effectiveness of handwashing for the students, educators used a fluorescent lotion mimicking germs on students hands. The students examine their "germs" under a black light and are encouraged to wash them off. Students then look again for the lotion



Children learn about keeping their hands away from their eyes, nose and mouth during a lesson. Photo credit: Jessie Osgood.

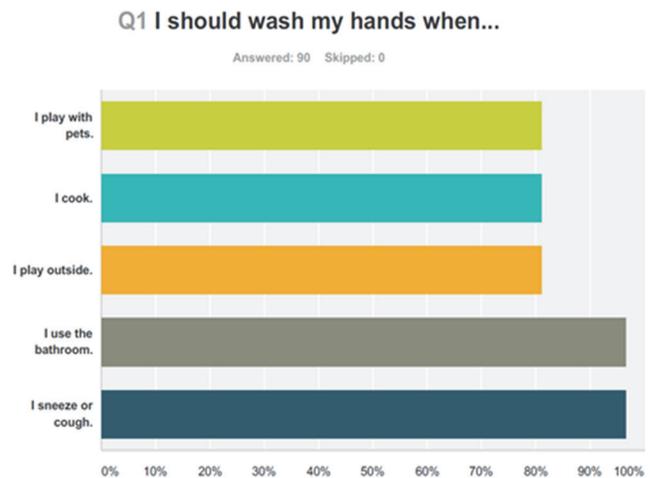
under the black light after washing. UI Extension educators in four counties across Idaho taught a 30-minute handwashing lesson to students in 11 classrooms in eight elementary schools throughout the state. UI Extension educators teach students to wash their hands for the recommended amount of time by singing the ABC song and demonstrate proper technique while practicing with the children. Students are encouraged to wash their hands and warned about how germs enter their bodies. Students are taught through explaining that the eyes, nose and mouth form the shape of the letter "T" and are encouraged not to touch the "T-zone." Lessons were taught in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms.

Program Outcomes

A one-month follow-up observational study was conducted with teachers whose students participated in the lessons. Data was collected from four teachers. The data indicated that all four teachers observed an increase in the number of times students were washing their hands. Students were encouraged by the UI Extension educators to wash when they arrived at school, before snacks or meals, after using the bathroom and after playing outside. Seventy-five percent of teachers surveyed observed an increase in student handwashing at suggested times, such as after playing outside. All of the responding teachers observed their students washing their hands before eating and after using the bathroom. Anecdotally, teachers noted students reminding each other to wash hands and that students are washing their hands more thoroughly and taking more time to wash. Teachers also reported that students sneeze and cough into the crook of their elbow or into their shirts more often after a handwashing lesson. Teachers continue to request the lessons annually, many times at the beginning of the school year or the start of cold and flu season to help combat illness in their classroom.

Students were also asked to self report their handwashing habits in a one-month follow-up survey. Ninety students in four classrooms responded to the

survey. Students were asked to circle a picture representing when they should wash their hands. One-hundred percent of students surveyed identified after using the bathroom and after sneezing and coughing as times to wash their hands. Eighty percent of students identified after playing with pets, when cooking or eating and after playing outside as proper times to wash their hands. UI Extension educators have demonstrated that their short handwashing lessons have resulted in increased handwashing among Idaho's elementary students throughout the school year.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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