

Green Clean Schools



Healthy Cleaning for Students, Staff and the Environment

Green Cleaning and Hand Hygiene

GreenCleanSchools.org

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The school food environment teaches children important lessons about the habits and behaviors they associate with eating, and one of the most important health-promoting habits we can instill in children is simple hand hygiene. Students should wash their hands before and after using the bathroom and the cafeteria, as well as after recess and when hands are visibly soiled.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and leading public health officials, hand hygiene is the single most important method of preventing the spread of infection. Experts recommend washing with plain soap and running water. Alcohol-based sanitizers are important alternatives when soap and water are not available.

Hand washing

Children should wash hands for about 20 seconds, about the time it takes to sing two choruses of “Happy Birthday to You.”

The *Harvard Health Letter* suggests these steps to make sure you clean your hands thoroughly, whether you’re using soap and water or a hand sanitizer:

1. Spread soap or sanitizer over hands.
2. Clean backs.
3. Clean fingertips.
4. Clean fingernails.
5. Clean thumbs.
6. Clean between fingers.
7. And be sure to dry hands thoroughly. Wet hands are more likely to spread germs than dry hands.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers

Alcohol-based sanitizers (minimum 60% alcohol) are not for removing soil from hands, but they are effective at reducing the number of bacteria present and are an important alternative to hand-washing when soap and water are not available. To be clear, alcohol-based sanitizers should not replace washing with soap and water when soap and water are available; rather, they are an additional hand hygiene tool that have an important role when soap and water are not available.

Alcohol-free hand sanitizers

Some schools are concerned about the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer for a variety of reasons (ingestion, flammability, odors, damage to floor finish) and are seeking alcohol-free options. There are alcohol-free options on the marketplace; however these have not been approved for use by the FDA or the CDC. Their long-term health and environmental impacts have not been fully studied.

Anti-bacterial hand soaps

When selecting hand soaps, it is not necessary to choose products with anti-bacterial ingredients for routine hand hygiene unless specifically required by local regulations.*

Triclosan and triclocarban, common antibacterial ingredients found in many hand soaps, are not recommended for routine hand hygiene. Studies have shown that antibacterial soaps containing triclosan and triclocarban are no more effective than plain soap at preventing infections. There is also a risk that the overuse of antibacterial products can contribute to the development of resistant strains of bacteria. What’s more, using plain soap will save schools money!

Learn more

The Centers for Disease Control offers additional resources on hand hygiene:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
Clean Hands Save Lives!

<http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
Healthy Habits Keep You Well

<http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper>

**Other than the small amounts of anti-bacterial ingredients used as a preservative in some hand soaps.*