

News Column

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Squashing School Bugs

With kids back in school, it is the perfect time to remind teachers, parents, and students about preventing sickness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 164 million school days are lost each year due to an illness. If there is anything that we have all learned over the past couple of years, it is how important proper hand washing is to help eliminate deadly bacteria and viruses.

No matter how big or small, bacteria including *Salmonella* and strains of *E. coli* can live up to two hours on cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and keyboards. Schools provide a great environment for germs to thrive due to shared surfaces that many kids touch frequently.

With regular and proper hand washing, we can all do our part in preventing the spread of bacteria in schools and among the entire community.

The first step to effective hand washing is to dampen hands with hot water and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Next, rub hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces up to your lower arms for at least 20 seconds. A helpful tip – singing your ABCs takes about the same amount of time as is recommended for scrubbing hands with soap. Once the 20 seconds is up, rinse hands well and use a disposable paper towel to thoroughly dry hands. You can even use a towel to turn off the faucet to help avoid recontamination after washing.

Hands should be washed:

- before, during, and after preparing food of any kind
- before you eat
- after using a tissue, sneezing, or coughing
- after handling animals or animal waste
- when your hands are visibly dirty
- more frequently when someone in your home is sick

If you find yourself in a situation without soap and running water, use alcohol-based wipes or sanitizing gels to help reduce the bacteria load found on your hands. Keep in mind that these products should not be used as a substitute for good traditional handwashing as it is still the most recommended way to eliminate bacteria.

Teaching kids the importance of proper hand washing will help reduce the number of days spent away from the classroom due to a tummy ache or a runny nose. Establishing good proper hygiene practices early in kids' lives will also help create healthy habits throughout their life.

For more information about Family and Community Wellness, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension, contact the office at 620-583-7455, email me at celutz@ksu.edu, or stop by the office. Visit the K-State Research and Extension - Greenwood County Facebook page and www.greenwood.k-state.edu for more up-to-date information on programming.