



Department of
Education

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINE

Hand washing and provision of soap or cleansing agents

Public education
A world of opportunities

The Department of Education's *Student Health Care* policy requires principals to develop and implement school procedures and practices to promote effective hygiene and reduce the spread of infection. Guidelines in the policy state that these procedures and practices should include the provision of products, facilities and explicit instructions for effective hand washing.

Hand washing is an important public health measure for reducing the impact of some communicable diseases such as gastroenteritis and influenza which can severely impact student attendance, learning and the wellbeing of the school community. Hand washing can also reduce the risk of exposure to common allergens such as peanuts for those in the school community who are anaphylactic, and decrease the risk of cross infection for students with chronic health conditions such as cystic fibrosis.

Schools are expected to instruct students to wash their hands:

- immediately after visiting the toilet
- before preparing food
- before and after eating food
- after being exposed to respiratory or other body fluids e.g. coughing or blowing their nose
- after playing sport
- at any other time when the hands are soiled.

Soap or another cleansing agent must be provided in all schools and students should be given developmentally appropriate instruction for effective hand washing. The Department of Health recommends the following steps:

- Wet hands, preferably with warm water
- Apply hand washing agent, e.g. soap, liquid soap
- Lather the hands and fingers for at least 15 seconds
- Rinse hands under running water
- Where possible, taps in public toilets should be turned off using a paper towel to avoid possible re-contamination of hands
- Hands can be cleansed using alcohol based products (gels, rinses, foams) containing an emollient that does not require the use of water (these products should be provided in addition to soap and water).

While there is no specific policy or procedural statement which identifies minimum requirements for provision by schools of hand washing materials or facilities for students, the Department expects that these strategies are in place in schools.

Decisions about the strategies adopted, materials or facilities provided and how they are made available for students are made by individual schools. This enables decision making that accounts for local factors and the requirement to maintain a healthy and safe environment for all students and staff.

Links to 'How to wash hands' posters

- https://cfsmart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CFF024-Handwash-Poster-CFA-Logo_HR-1.pdf
- https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/publications/attachments/ch55g_how_to_wash_hands_poster_130701.pdf