



INTERNET ARTICLE

I WASH MY HANDS, DO YOU?

19 October 2015

Even the weather was unable to put a damper on activities to mark the annual Global Handwashing Day activities by officials of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Water and Sanitation (KZN DWS). As the rain poured in Mooi River, about 100 young enthusiastic learners from Jabulani Combined School gathered around the hall to hear how to properly wash hands and receive health and hygiene information.

October 15th marked the annual Global Handwashing Day aimed at increasing awareness and understanding about the importance of hand washing with soap as an effective and affordable way to prevent diseases. This year's theme for Global Handwashing Day was "Raise a hand for hygiene". The theme is action driven; the act of raising a hand is one of association and can symbolize a person as a hygiene champion.

During the awareness roadshow, the KZN DWS provincial office was supported by KZN Department of Health who also wanted to raise awareness and to profile the Global Handwashing Day to learners. The day started with a school visit at Bruntville Primary School which was then followed by Jabulani Combined School (Primary and Secondary) in Mooi River where learners were educated about the Global Handwashing Day, followed by demonstrations on how to wash hands properly.

"How do I wash my hands, when do I wash my hands and why do I need to wash my hands?" were some of the questions asked of officials during their presentations. Miss Thembeke Bhengu from KZN DWS presented to the learners the need to wash their hands and demonstrated how to properly wash hands. She started off by asking the learners if they were aware of the "Global Handwashing Day" and "how often do they wash their hands".

"The aim of school visits during the Global Handwashing Day was that learners act as agents of change, as they take the good practices of hygiene learned back into their homes and communities", explained Ms. Bhengu. "The active participation and involvement of learners, along with culturally sensitive community-based interventions aimed at ensuring sustained behavioural change are critical."



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Children suffer excessively from diarrhoeal diseases – with more than 3 million children under five dying every year from diarrhoea and pneumonia-related diseases. The simple act of washing hands with soap can reduce the incidences of diarrhoea among children under five by almost 50 per cent, and respiratory infections by nearly 25 percent.

Miss Bhengu started her presentations with the best introduction, "Have you washed your hands today?". I could hear some learners whispering "But why are adults so hung up on hand washing? Why are they so in love with lather?".

"Washing your hands is the best way to stop germs from spreading. Think about all of the things that you touched today — from the cellphone to the toilet. Maybe you blew your nose into a tissue and then went outside to dig around the dirt", said Ms. Bhengu.

"Whatever you did today, you came into contact with germs. It's easy for a germ on your hand to end up in your mouth. Think about how much food you eat with your hands."

You can't wear rubber gloves all day long, but you can wash your hands so those germs don't get a chance to make you or someone else sick. So when are the best times to wash your hands?

- *when your hands are dirty*
- *before eating or touching food (like if you're helping to cook or bake, for example)*
- *after using the bathroom*
- *after blowing your nose or coughing*
- *after touching pets or other animals*
- *after playing outside*
- *before and after visiting a sick relative or friend.*

*Now you have the **when** and the **why** of hand washing. But did you know that a lot of people don't know **how** to get their hands perfectly clean?*

The next time you're told to step up to the sink and scrub up, remember these handy hints:

1. *Use warm water (not cold or hot) when you wash your hands.*
2. *Use whatever soap you like. Some soaps come in cool shapes and colours or smell nice, but whatever kind gets you scrubbing is the kind you should use. Antibacterial soaps are OK to use, but regular soap works fine.*



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3. *Work up some lather on both sides of your hands, your wrists, and between your fingers. Don't forget to wash around your nails. This is one place germs like to hide. Wash for about 10 to 15 seconds — about how long it takes to sing "Happy Birthday."*
4. *Rinse and dry well with a clean towel.*

Let's keep EVERYONE around us healthy by becoming Champion Hand Washers!

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