

How do you protect yourself from germs? This is peak season for colds and flu. This week I've had the privilege to show students at Cypress Springs how to reduce their risk of bacteria and viruses. Students learned how germs spread by applying glitter glow potion on their hands. They touched their face, clothes and shake hands with their classmates. The students went into the Germ Cave, a 12 x12 dark tent with backlights, to see just how germs can be spread by touch. While in the Germ cave, the black lights laminated any spot they touched. Students could not believe they might pick up so many germs in one day.

According to the Mayo Clinic, the common cold is the number one reason children miss school. The Center for Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that nearly 22 million school days are lost due to the common cold. The CDC estimates that in an average year school children get 6 to 10 colds.

Schools are more susceptible to germs because children are in close contact with each other all day. They share materials and supplies, sneeze on desk top, they touch doorknobs, the pencil sharpener, and the water fountain handle, spreading germs to others.

Germs are found everywhere, in the air we breathe, on the food we eat, on our skin, and on everything we touch. Not all bacteria make us sick, but schools are a breeding ground for germs. What can parents, students, and teachers do to prevent the spread of germs? Teach students when to **wash their hands**: after using the bathroom, after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing into your hands after touching animals, and after handling garbage. Teach them to wash their hands before and after they eat, prepare a snack or meal, touching a sick person, and taking care of a cut or wound.

Hand washing is the most important thing we can do to fight off germs. The Center for Disease Control recommends the following hand washing techniques:

1. Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if it is available.
2. Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
3. Continue rubbing hands for 20 seconds, the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice.
4. Rinse hands well under running water.
5. Dry hands using a paper towel or air dryer. Use your paper towel to turn off the faucet.

With these five simple steps: wet, lather, rub, rinse, and dry you, can reduce the spread of germs.

When soap and water are not available hand sanitizers can be used to reduce germs. The CDC says that the hand sanitizer must contain at least sixty percent alcohol to kill germs. Hand sanitizers are not effective killing germs if your hands are visibly dirty or greasy. Use hand sanitizers by putting the product in the palm of your hand, rub all over your hands, and let the product dry. Be sure to read the label on the back of the hand sanitizer to know how much product needs to be used.

Students can also reduce the risk of passing germs by not sharing supplies. Wipe down common surfaces used by all, such as desktops, doorknobs, drinking fountains, water faucets, light switches, and handles.

If your school or organization would like to have the Germ Cave visit to teach the spread of germs call the LSU AgCenter at 318/251-5134.

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