



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Public Health Director Recommends Hand Sanitizer for School Kids

SACRAMENTO – California’s Public Health Director, Dr. Mark Horton, has issued a recommendation that California schools promote the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers by students.

“As kids return to classrooms it is more important than ever that we take steps to slow the spread of influenza-like viruses, including the novel H1N1 virus,” said Horton, who is the director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). “Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are very effective germicides against many viruses and bacteria.”

The latest recommendation comes on the heels of guidelines issued for the general response by schools to the continuing outbreak of H1N1. Those guidelines recommend that sick students be separated from others and sent home and stay there until at least 24 hours after a fever breaks. Any dismissal decision should be based on the risk of keeping students in school with the social disruption that school dismissal can cause. In most cases, schools should remain open unless the student population is at high-risk.

CDPH’s hand sanitizer recommendation recognizes that millions of school days are annually lost by students due to absenteeism caused by colds and other common illnesses that are commonly spread by contact with contaminated hands.

While soap and water is an effective measure to combat the spread of germs, access to soap and water in schools may be limited. Studies have shown that the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers can decrease rates of illness and absenteeism.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used safely in classroom with a few simple precautions:

- Students are taught about the effectiveness of hand hygiene in stemming the spread of disease.
- In elementary schools, sanitizers are used under the direction of teachers.
- Students may use sanitizers throughout the day, in addition to hand washing with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing and before eating.
- There is a procedure in place to monitor possible allergic reactions.
- All alcohol-based sanitizer products are kept away from eyes, mouth and nose.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are kept away from any type of open flame. Smokers should not light a cigarette until their hands are completely dry.

The full text of the CDPH recommendation regarding alcohol-based hand sanitizers is below. For more information on school guidance, visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools.

www.cdph.ca.gov

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CDPH Recommendations for the Use of Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizers by Students in California Schools

- *The use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (gels, foams, or wipes) containing at least 60% alcohol should be promoted in California schools because:*
 - *Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are very effective germicides against many viruses (including influenza) and bacteria (including methicillin-resistant and susceptible Staphylococcus aureus(MRSA/MSSA)).*
 - *Millions of school days are annually lost by students due to absenteeism caused by colds and other common illness that are primarily spread among students through contact with contaminated hands. There is increasing concern about MRSA, which is also spread among students primarily through contact with contaminated hands.*
 - *Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza is still causing frequent infections in California. Approximately half of these infections occur in children under the age of 18 years, and transmission is common in settings where children gather. When California schools resume classes, transmission of influenza will put both students and the community at risk, unless high rates of vaccination can be achieved when vaccine becomes available.*
 - *Access to soap and water for handwashing in schools may be limited, while alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be made easily available in every classroom.*
 - *Studies have shown that the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers can decrease rates of illness and absenteeism among students and has the potential to reduce teacher absenteeism, school operating costs, healthcare costs and parental absenteeism. It is possible that effective use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers might reduce the need for student dismissals.*
- *Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used safely in the classroom with a few simple precautions. The use of these products by students is recommended if:*
 - *Students are taught about the importance of hand hygiene practices in the control of communicable disease.*
 - *In elementary school classrooms, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are used under the direction of a teacher or other school employee.*
 - *In secondary schools, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are available in wall dispensers that are readily visible to a teacher, convenient for use by students, and able to be secured after school hours.*

- *Students may use alcohol-based hand sanitizers periodically during each school day, in addition to hand washing with soap and water, after coughing or sneezing, toileting and before eating. This may be implemented by having students use the product each time they enter and leave the classroom.*
- *There is a procedure in place to monitor the occurrence of allergic reactions; if a student appears to develop an allergic reaction to an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, advise the student to discontinue using the product and instead wash hands with soap and water, and notify the school nurse and parent of the possible allergic reaction.*
- *All alcohol-based hand sanitizer products are kept away from contact with the eyes, mouth, and nose.*
- *Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are kept away from any type of open flame or where sparks could be generated; smokers should not light a cigarette until their hands are completely dry after use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.*