



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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To: Massachusetts School Districts
Massachusetts Educational Collaboratives
Massachusetts Local Boards of Health
Massachusetts School Nurses
Massachusetts Non-Public Schools

From: Karen Robitaille, MBA, MSN, RN, NCSN, Director of School Health Services

Date: June 30, 2020

Re: Handwashing Recommendations and Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizer Use in Schools

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to all elementary and secondary schools in Massachusetts on handwashing recommendations and alcohol-based hand sanitizer use in schools.

This guidance will be updated as needed and as additional information is available. Please regularly check mass.gov/covid19 for updated guidance.

Handwashing

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend hand washing to reduce infection transmission. The single most important thing that we can do to keep from getting sick and spreading illness to others is to clean our hands,¹ and handwashing with soap and water is the recommended method of hand hygiene in non-healthcare settings.² Schools should promote hand hygiene to decrease the spread of disease in the school community. This can be accomplished by education on proper hand hygiene; through posters,³ bulletin boards, communication to parents, morning announcements, and in curriculum as appropriate. Schools should provide adequate facilities for hand washing which include soap, paper towels or hand dryers, and trash bins for disposal of paper towels. During periods of high rates of transmission of disease, schools should permit students time to wash their hands after using the restroom, before meals and after if needed, after recess or physical education, before and after using

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/why-handwashing.html>

² https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6608a5.htm?s_cid=mm6608a5_w

³ Handwashing posters are available at the Massachusetts Clearing House for download and to print at <https://massclearinghouse.ehs.state.ma.us/category/HAND.html>.

electronic devices or other shared equipment used by multiple students, after coughing or sneezing, and other times as appropriate. DPH may also issue additional guidance for handwashing (e.g., washing hands on arrival to school) in response to specific disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19.

Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizers

If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers (with at least 60% alcohol) are an effective alternative for cleaning hands and are recommended as an alternative to soap and water by CDC⁴ and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.⁵ Hand sanitizers that are not alcohol based are not recommended.

How to use hand sanitizer:⁶

- Apply the gel, liquid, or foam product to the palm of one hand (read the label to learn the correct amount).
- Rub your hands together.
- Rub the gel, liquid, or foam over all the surfaces of your hands and fingers until your hands are dry. This should take around 20 seconds.

School physicians may approve and permit the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers for use in their schools/school districts through the use of a standing order to allow the use of hand sanitizer without individual physician orders, as alcohol-based hand sanitizers are considered over-the-counter drugs by the United States Food and Drug Administration. Standing orders should be developed collaboratively by the school physician and school nursing staff and should include drug name, dose to be administered, dosage frequency, indications for use, contraindications, potential side effects, and any assessment criteria to be gathered prior to administration.

Student use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers should always be supervised by adults to ensure correct application and reduce the risk of harmful exposure.⁷ A school that has received the approval of the school physician to permit the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers may permit properly trained school personnel to supervise the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Parents/guardians should be informed of the use of hand sanitizers in their child's school and be allowed to opt their child out of using hand sanitizer by sending a written notice to the school.

Please note that hand sanitizers contain alcohol and are flammable and can create a fire hazard. Placement of dispensers and safe storage of hand sanitizer should be reviewed with local fire departments.⁸

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-hand-sanitizer.html>

⁵ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-prevention-and-treatment>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

⁷ <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.2007.00893.x>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/firesafety/index.html>

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- CDC Health Promotion Materials, includes downloadable posters;
- Information on proper handwashing technique; and
- Tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>

Massachusetts Department of Public Health:

Handwashing Education Materials

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/handwashing-education-materials-for-the-general-public>