

Assembly kit

Please wash your hands



This short, instructive and lively assembly is designed to give students a skill that, if practised, will last them a lifetime. It will give them an insight into standard practices in health services and other places where hygiene is paramount. It should also give students clean hands. Or, at least, cleaner hands.

Age group

This assembly is intended for use in primary schools, and could also be used in secondary schools.

Aims

- > To raise students' awareness of the need for hygiene in different settings.
- > To give students basic instruction in the hand-washing techniques recommended for use in the health services.
- > To help students appreciate that in some places in the world hand washing is a life and death matter.

Preparation

Preparation for the performance consists of getting together a number of performers and readers. Numbers are not critical, since parts can easily be doubled up, or split further. The blueprint here assumes four readers and around seven performers. Vary it as required.

Teachers will need to prepare some signs – or sheets of A4 paper – each with one of the following phrases on it:

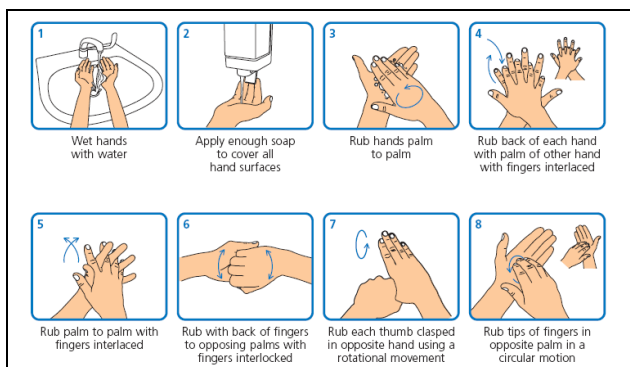
- > Please wash your hands
- > A nurse
- > A waiter
- > A chef
- > An aid worker after a disaster
- > A surgeon in a hospital
- > A first aider
- > A school pupil

The first will be used by voice 1 at the very beginning of the assembly. The others need to be distributed to the performers, who will walk on clutching them, and reading out the words.

It will also be very helpful to display the [hand-washing chart](#).

Or you might print smaller versions to hand out to classes or groups.

[Download a copy of the chart.](#)



Performance

Voice 1

Anyone know where you are likely to see the following sign?

Hold up prepared sign: "Please wash your hands"

Pause for thought, and answers if appropriate

Voice 2

It's obvious. In a toilet... that's why some people call them "washrooms".

Voice 3

Or in a kitchen. Or a hospital.

Voice 4

Or at the doctor's.

Voice 1

How important is this? How much does it really matter whether you have clean hands or not? Watch this parade of characters. Think about how important it is that each of them has clean hands.

The seven characters (see list in preparation above) appear one at a time, showing their signs and announcing "I am a nurse", "I am a waiter" and so on.

Find a way to prioritise the importance of the seven characters. The aim is to get them in line, in some sort of order from highest to lowest importance. Get contributions from the assembly and at each point discuss why it is important. Precisely how you do this, and how much time you spend on it, will depend on your circumstances.

Voice 2

Hands can pass germs from one person to another. They can spread diseases. We even pass illnesses to ourselves with our hands. For example, a germ called a virus can cause vomiting and diarrhoea. We pick up the virus on our hands and pass it into our system.

Someone who never touched their mouth or face would be ill less than someone who does. Families who wash their hands regularly are ill less than others.

The vomiting and diarrhoea virus is a nuisance but it isn't necessarily serious. But other germs can make people very ill. For people whose bodies are already weakened, such as those in hospital, or people in an emergency who have had little food and water, it is even more dangerous. They could die from germs passed on from people's hands.

Voice 3

We now know why it is important to wash your hands. But how do you wash them? How can you be sure that they are properly clean?

This is so important that scientists have worked out a routine. This is a way of hand washing that they say hospital staff and others must follow. Hand washing isn't just something that young children are taught. Adults need to learn it too. And this is what you do.

Play fanfare or dramatic flourish as appropriate, then announce:

Voice 1

A hand-washing technique is used in many hospitals, clinics and doctors' surgeries.

Display the hand-washing chart at this point.

This is what you do:

Voice 2

Use soap or an antiseptic solution and running water.

Voice 3

Wet hands under running water.

Voice 4

Dispense one dose of soap into cupped hands.

Voice 2

Hand wash for 10-15 seconds vigorously and thoroughly, without adding more water.

Voice 3

Rinse hands thoroughly under running water.

Voice 4

Dry hands with disposable paper towel.

Voice 1

The hand washing itself consists of seven steps – as you can see from the chart. Everyone can try this now.

Voice 2

- > Rub palm to palm
- > Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand with fingers interlaced

Voice 3

- > Palm to palm with fingers interlaced
- > Back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlaced

Voice 4

- > Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand using a rotational movement

Voice 2

- > Rub tips of fingers in opposite palm in a circular motion
- > Rub each wrist with opposite hand

Voice 1

Congratulations. You have now tried the official way of washing your hands. Practise it, and you will help reduce the spread of diseases.

End of performance

Follow-up activities

The idea of this assembly is that it is short and sweet. But it can be followed up and extended in many ways. Here are some options:

- > Look at people's restricted access to clean water in developing countries. A good start is [World Water Day](#) on 22 March which each year has a different theme.
- > Discuss obsessive compulsive disorders. Some people wash too often. It becomes a habit that needs breaking.
- > Explore hand washing as a metaphor signifying a refusal to accept guilt. Think Pontius Pilate or Lady Macbeth.
- > Learn how soap is made. Try getting fat to react with ashes of hardwoods.
- > Find out how people washed before soap. Ancient Greeks and Romans applied oil to their skin and scraped it and the dirt off with a curved piece of metal called a strigil.

This assembly kit is part of the humanitarian education programme produced by the British Red Cross. Teachers and other educators are free to use it, copy it and circulate it for their work. Please always include this notice and contact details.

This assembly kit was researched and written by PJ White and produced in March 2008 and updated in November 2009.

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