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Study findings show infection control intervention helps keep kids in school *Disinfecting and using hand sanitizers helped reduce absenteeism rates in elementary schools*

BOSTON, June 2, 2008 – A study from researchers at Children's Hospital Boston published in *Pediatrics* found that a simple infection control intervention in elementary schools – disinfecting frequently-touched surfaces and using alcohol-based hand sanitizers – helped reduce illness-related student absenteeism.

Illnesses caused by bacteria and viruses account for millions of lost school days each year.¹ According to Thomas Sandora, MD, MPH, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at Children's Hospital Boston, "The best ways to avoid common infections are cleaning your hands and preventing exposure to the germs that cause these illnesses. Our research indicates that elementary schools should consider a few simple infection control practices to help keep students healthier."

The study, led by Dr. Sandora, was a randomized, controlled trial involving 285 third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students in an elementary school system in Avon, Ohio. Teachers in intervention classrooms used disinfecting wipes on student desks, and students used hand sanitizer in the classroom at key points throughout the school day. Control classrooms followed usual hand washing and cleaning procedures.

Over eight weeks, researchers tracked the frequency of absences and the reasons for missing school. Study investigators also tested several classroom surfaces for total bacterial counts and for the presence of several common viruses.

Researchers found absenteeism rates for gastrointestinal illnesses were nine percent lower in classrooms that followed the infection control regimen of disinfecting surfaces and using alcohol-based hand sanitizers. The absenteeism rate for respiratory illness was not affected by this intervention.

Gastrointestinal illnesses are extremely common for school-age children, and children can be at risk for these infections because of frequent exposure to ill peers and poor hand hygiene.¹ In fact, the bacteria and viruses that cause these gastrointestinal infections can be easily passed from one person to another on the hands.² The germs can also survive on surfaces in the environment, where some of them can persist for hours to days.¹

The study suggests that schools should consider adopting simple infection control practices, including disinfecting desktops once a day and using hand sanitizer before and after lunch, to help reduce days lost to common illnesses.

The study involved a single elementary school system (classrooms located in two buildings) located in Avon, Ohio. Study funds, hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes were provided by The Clorox Company (Oakland, Calif).

Children's Hospital Boston is home to the world's largest research enterprise based at a pediatric medical center, where its discoveries have benefited both children and adults since 1869. More than 500

¹ <http://www.itsasnap.org/snap/references.asp#6>

² <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/faq.htm>

scientists, including eight members of the National Academy of Sciences, 11 members of the Institute of Medicine and 12 members of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute comprise Children's research community. Founded as a 20-bed hospital for children, Children's Hospital Boston today is a 397-bed comprehensive center for pediatric and adolescent health care grounded in the values of excellence in patient care and sensitivity to the complex needs and diversity of children and families. Children's also is the primary pediatric teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School. For more information about the hospital and its research visit: www.childrenshospital.org/newsroom.

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