



Hand Hygiene and the Use of Antiseptic Towellettes And Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizers



Office of Safety and Security Fact Sheet

What is the most effective hand hygiene measure to reduce infection transmission?

The Centers for Disease Control has found 88% of disease transmission occurs through hand contact. Sneezing and coughing can spread cold and flu germs in the air, but most illnesses are spread through germs on hands. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends hand washing to reduce infection transmission. Effective hand washing can only be done with soap and water. For more information on hand washing, please see www.fcps.edu/fts/safety-security/publications/seh-13.pdf.

Proper hand washing (with soap, water and paper towels or hand dryer) will remove 99% or more of harmful microorganisms from hands. Antiseptic towellettes and alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not a substitute for proper hand washing when hand washing facilities are available (soap, water, paper towels or hand dryer). When dealing with visibly soiled hands, the most effective method to achieve the best hand hygiene is proper and thorough hand washing. Hand washing should be done frequently and especially at the following times:

BEFORE

- Preparing food
- Eating
- Inserting or removing contact lenses
- Rendering first aid or treating a person who is ill
- Administering medication or completing medical procedure

AFTER

- Any contact with blood, body fluids or soiled objects
- Using the toilet
- Assisting with personal hygiene, such as changing diapers
- Touching animals or animal waste
- Food preparation, especially after handling raw meat, poultry, or fish
- Treating or touching open wounds or a person who is sick or injured
- After handling trash or garbage
- After playing outdoors

What are Antiseptic Towellettes?

Antiseptic towellettes are the preferred method of hand hygiene when water is not available and hands are not visibly dirty. The antiseptic towellettes available through the FCPS warehouse contain a benzalkonium chloride (BZK) solution, an effective hand sanitizing disinfectant.

FCIN # 3842200012, TOWELETTE, ANTISEPTIC, 5 X 7 , INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED, Regular Supply

Antiseptic towellettes are to be used when water is not readily available and when hands are not visibly soiled. Antiseptic towellettes have been found to be more effective in removing proteins (peanut allergies) from hands than alcohol-based hand sanitizers (Perry-Arrah, 2004).



Are Antiseptic Towellettes safe to use?

The antiseptic towellettes available from the FCPS warehouse contain a safe and effective disinfectant. Proper adult supervision should occur to make sure that the towellettes are not misused and that towellettes are properly disposed off after use.

What are alcohol-based hand sanitizers?

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers (ABHS) are hand disinfectants that are available as rubs, gels or rinses. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective as a disinfectant supplement after washing hands, or in situations when water is not readily available, to get rid of a range of germs that cause illness. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers should not be used when hands are visibly dirty.

Hand Sanitizer Facts

- ABHS must be at least 60 percent alcohol to be effective.
- ABHS are not effective in removing tree nut or peanut allergens from hand surfaces.
- Some bacteria, such as *Clostridium difficile*, are not affected by ABHS.
- Scented ABHS may trigger an allergic reaction. Unscented ABHS should be used.
- ABHS are flammable and must be treated as such. Static electricity, other sparks or open flames can ignite alcohol on hands. Users should be instructed to rub hands thoroughly until dry (30-60 seconds).
- ABHS (without emollients) may cause dry skin, irritation and rashes.
- ABHS People who have open cuts or skin conditions may find that applying alcohol-based hand sanitizers may cause further irritation.

Are alcohol-based hand sanitizers safe to use?

First, consider using Antiseptic towellettes instead of alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

If your school decides to allow the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, the school should ensure that the product is used in a manner mentioned above (only when water is not available and hands are not visibly dirty) and that adequately protects against inappropriate access by students. A hand sanitizer with 60 percent alcohol represents a 120 proof liquid/gel. It will be necessary to ensure that students don't ingest it or use it to injure another person (e.g., fling it into eyes or facial mucous membranes). If ingested, alcohol-based hand sanitizers can cause alcohol poisoning in small children.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers also must be properly secured from children and stored - which includes away from high temperatures or flames - in accordance with National Fire Protection Agency recommendations.

The alcohol-content of the disinfectant product completely evaporates after rubbing hands for 30 to 60 seconds, so there is no residue left on the hands, and children can safely touch their mouth or eyes and there should not be a fire hazard.

Schools should not consider installing wall mounted alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers. These dispensers will not adequately secure the alcohol-based hand sanitizer from misuse or accidental ingestion.

For more information or questions, please contact the Office of Safety and Security at 571-423-2010.