

Hand Washing Using Paint as a Visual Aid

Objective

By using paint as a visual tool, students will gain perspective on how effectively they typically wash their hands compared to the CDC-recommended method of hand washing.

Materials

- Disposable latex or non-latex gloves
- Acrylic paint in a contrasting color to the gloves
- Alternative: No gloves; use washable, non-toxic paint directly on hands
- Optional: 20-second timer

Procedure

1. If using acrylic paint, have some or all students put on a pair of disposable gloves.
2. Give the students a small (dime-size) squirt of paint.
3. Instruct the students to “wash their hands” by rubbing their hands together as if the paint were soap. Paint will spread as areas of the hands are scrubbed. Encourage the students to act as if they were really washing their hands for the length of time they typically would. Note the number of seconds most students use to “wash” their hands.
4. Reveal the number of seconds most students used to “wash” their hands. Have students analyze where the paint was spread on their gloved hands, taking note of areas commonly missed and any other identifiable trends.
5. Demonstrate proper hand washing by putting on disposable gloves, adding a small squirt of paint, and rubbing hands together for 20 seconds. Display a timer or have students count to twenty out loud.
6. Compare the two methods. Which one was more successful at “cleaning” their hands?

Alternative procedure:

1. If using acrylic paint, have some or all students put on a pair of disposable gloves.
2. Give each participating student a small (dime-size) squirt of paint.
3. Set a timer, but do not display the timer so that the students cannot see the time.
4. Have each participating student “wash their hands” by rubbing hands together until all surfaces of their hands have been “cleaned,” including palms, backs of hands, fingers, in-between fingers, under fingernails, and wrists.
5. Reveal how many seconds the students took to fully “clean” their hands.

Results

The spreading of paint as students pretend to wash their hands acts as a visual representation of soap scrubbing away germs during hand washing.

Questions

- How “clean” were the hands of students who pretended to wash their hands for the length of time they typically do?
- How “clean” were the hands of the person who pretended to wash their hands for twenty seconds?
- What were any emerging trends in handwashing? Were there areas of hands scrubbed thoroughly or other areas that were commonly missed?
- After practicing washing the palms, backs of hands, fingers, in-between fingers, under fingernails, and wrists, are there parts of their hands that students sometimes forget to wash?

Resources

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website page: [“Show me the science - How to wash your hands”](#)

