



SOME SCHOOL HANDWASHING FACILITIES 'APPALLING' SAYS PHA

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Public Health Association (PHA) Director Dr Gay Keating is urging all people – but especially school boards of trustees – to take action in response to new research that has found New Zealanders are lax when it comes to washing their hands.

The research, published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, found almost 20 percent of men, and 8 percent of women didn't wash their hands after going to the toilet.

"Hand washing is a first defence against the spread of coughs, colds, the flu, tummy bugs and food poisoning. When the influenza pandemic hits, hand washing is going to be one of the most important ways of keeping you and your family alive."

She says some schools have appalling washroom facilities, and it is often not possible for students to wash and dry their hands properly – even if they want to.

"Sometimes there is no soap, let alone hot water, and children are expected to wash their hands in freezing water, even in the middle of winter. There may be no paper towels, or hand dryers.

"This is a great disincentive to proper hand washing, and pupils who do not wash their hands properly are at greater risk of contracting illnesses themselves, or passing on bugs. They then have to have days off school, which recent educational research has shown often leads to them falling behind in school work."

She says hand hygiene requires soap, water and drying, and shouldn't be hurried.

"You should wash for at least 20 seconds. Then hands need to be dried for at least 20 seconds because wet hands can transfer bugs."

All schools should provide pupils with soap, warm water and hand-drying facilities, Dr Keating says.

"Hand-hygiene is basic to maintaining good health."

For further information:

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