Use of hand disinfection reduces absenteeism from day care centres

A Lennell (anne.lennell@orebroll.se), H Fredlund

1. Department of Clinical Microbiology, Unit for Infectious Disease Control, Örebro University Hospital, Örebro, Sweden

A study carried out in day care centres in ten counties in southern and central Sweden showed that using hand disinfection with ethyl alcohol reduced absenteeism among children due to illness by 12%. The study, recently published in *Acta Paediatrica* [1], was planned and coordinated by the strategy group for rational use of antibiotics and reduced antibiotic resistance (Strama), the Swedish Institute for Infectious Disease Control (Smittskyddsinstitutet, SMI), and the public health department in Örebro County Council, Sweden. It estimated that the cost of caring for sick children could be decreased by about 200 million SEK per year. The cost to introduce hand disinfection gel in day care centres across Sweden was estimated at 10 million SEK per year.

Initially, the study included nearly 3,000 children at 60 day care centres during a 30-week period from 2004 to 2005. A complete evaluation was available for 1,431 children in 29 day care centres. Neighbouring day care centres were paired up, with one of the centres using hand disinfection after hand washing (intervention group), while the other centre using soap and water only (control group). Absenteeism due to illness was measured by means of the centres’ attendance lists and compared between the intervention and control groups. In the intervention group, staff and children used hand disinfection gel containing 70% ethyl alcohol following each hand wash with soap, on average between two and six times per day, after bathroom use, before eating, and when dirty.

There are other published studies connecting hygiene routines with absenteeism at day care centres in the United States, Finland, Canada, and Australia. In those studies, hand disinfection was only one of several components. The Swedish study is the first study to evaluate hand disinfection exclusively, a simple measure that is inexpensive to introduce.

After the study had ended, several day care centres chose to continue the use of the disinfection gel.

References


This article was published on 16 October 2008. Citation style for this article: Lennell A, Fredlund H. Use of hand disinfection reduces absenteeism from day care centres. *Euro Surveill*. 2008;13(42):pii=19006. Available online: http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=19006