

# IMPACT



Cassia County, 1013 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Burley, Idaho 83318; 208-878-9461; Fax: 208-878-7862

## Germ City Attacks Cassia County

### *The Situation*

Every year, thousands of Americans become ill with severe vomiting, diarrhea, headache, fever, abdominal pain, and nausea. Sometimes people often call this the 24 hour flu. This illness is the second most likely infection in America, after the common cold. It is called Norovirus, and humans are the only known host. Norovirus is spread by a person swallowing contaminated food or water. This virus is spread easily from person to person when hands are not washed after going to the restroom.

One of the best ways for a person to stay healthy is to wash their hands often, and wash them properly. One study conducted in Detroit, reported that children washing their hands at scheduled times had 24% fewer sick days due to respiratory illness, and 51% fewer days lost because of stomach upset, than did children in classrooms without scheduled hand washing.

Idaho has found that proper hand washing can be taught in a fun "hands-on" way using black lights and black light sensitive lotion.

### *Our Response*

Extension Educators in Idaho have responded by conducting Germ City: Clean Hands-Healthy People. Educators constructed a tunnel that is covered with a black tarp; black lights are placed inside the tunnel. Children and adults are asked to put black light sensitive lotion (Glitterbug Potion) on their hands and enter the tunnel. Under the black lights, their hands glow white demonstrating pretend germs. After the initial observation of their hands,

they are asked to wash their hands and then return to the tunnel to observe how well they washed.

In Cassia County, the Extension Educator took time before the actual hands on portion of the demonstration to talk about how to properly wash your hands using the Alphabet song, warm water, and soap. After the hands on portion, a brief discussion was conducted with the youth about how they felt they did at washing their hands.

Germ City had 688 youth at a local elementary school participate in the spring of 2006 during a week of ISAT testing. The youth ranged from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Program Outcomes*

As a result of this program, all students indicated that they would work on improving their hand washing skills.

Evaluations were conducted after the youth completed the hands on activity. Results were:

- 90% of all participants planned to work on washing their hands after coughing or sneezing.
- 82% of all participants planned to work on washing their hands after playing or working outdoors.
- 85% of all participants planned to work on washing their hands before preparing or eating meals.
- 85% of all participants planned to work on washing their hands after playing with animals.
- 70% of all participants planned to work on washing their hands after going to the bathroom.

When asked what part of their hands and arms they needed to clean well, most youth indicated the need to wash between their fingers, their finger nails, and their wrists.

This program will be offered to all schools in the Mini-Cassia area to continue to improve the hand washing skills of our youth.

### **The Future**

We will continue to offer this program to schools and health fairs as they request it. We plan to conduct this program with the CYFAR (Children Youth and Families at Risk) after-school program in Cassia County over the next five years. This program is also used by our Extension Nutrition Program teachers at various teaching opportunities.

### ***For More Information***

Grace Wittman, Extension Educator  
University of Idaho Extension—Cassia County  
1013 West 16th Street  
Burley, Idaho 83318  
208-878-9461  
Fax: 208-878-7862  
Email: [gwittman@uidaho.edu](mailto:gwittman@uidaho.edu)