Germ City: Reaching elementary children in the Coeur d’Alene School District

The Situation
In October 2007, two students and one staff member in the Coeur d’Alene School District were diagnosed with MRSA or methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. MRSA is known as a super bug, a type of staph infection that is resistant to methicillin and other commonly used antibiotics in the same class. MRSA is a skin infection that can be deadly, in fact, in 2005 19,000 people died from MRSA infections. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the best way to prevent the spread of MRSA, and other harmful bacteria, is to properly wash your hands frequently throughout the day.

Our Response
The nursing staff at the district were very interested in using the MRSA outbreak as a “teachable moment” with their students and staff at the eleven elementary schools in Coeur d’Alene. They were looking for an effective way of teaching hand-washing education. Partnering with University of Idaho Extension who offers hand-washing education through Germ City was a natural fit.

Germ City is a program that teaches and motivates children about the importance of hand washing for good health. The Germ City exhibit is a 7’ high x 7’ long x 3’ wide tent-like structure with a ultra-violet light inside. Children apply a black light sensitive lotion to their hands and enter Germ City and see pretend germs. After initial observation, participants wash their hands normally, re-visit Germ City, and assess their effectiveness.

Germ City was offered to every elementary school in the district, plus one middle school and the high school. Each classroom was offered ~ 15 minutes of direct education stressing:

• Germs are everywhere
• Germs can make you sick
• Germs are so small that you can not see them
• You can get rid of germs by washing your hands
• When to Wash
• How to Wash

Program Outcomes
From November 2007 through April 2008, hand-washing education was taught to over 4,900 students in the Coeur d’Alene School District.

• 100% of the children could demonstrate “how to wash” their hands effectively
• 100% could recite the most important times to wash.

The Germ City/Coeur d’Alene School District Project was highlighted during the All Nurses Day Conference in Coeur d’Alene in May 2008. Nurses from the five northern counties were represented at the meeting. As a result, Germ City was scheduled in the Post Falls School District and at all of the elementary schools in the Silver Valley. Germ City will continue to be available to any school interested in an effective way of teaching hand-washing education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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