



PSEA Education Services Division

# ...IN BRIEF

July 30, 2020

## Strategies to Encourage Health and Hygiene Practices among Students in Classrooms

Many schools across Pennsylvania are returning to in-person or hybrid instruction in the next month. District-approved plans will drive most initiatives to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19, and many policies and procedures established in district plans will focus on maintaining social distance among everyone in school.

Researchers have demonstrated that basic hygiene practices can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep ourselves and our friends, neighbors, and family members healthy. Consequently, the PA Department of Education has issued guidance informing schools that they should implement hygiene strategies such as handwashing, cough and sneeze coverage, reduced facial touching, and frequent sanitation.<sup>1</sup> School entities are developing plans to implement hygiene and sanitation practices to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 that will include expectations for school buses, in classrooms, around drinking fountains, and in other high traffic areas in school buildings such as bathrooms and cafeterias.

***In addition to following the mitigation efforts contained in an education entity's plan, individual educators may have some flexibility in building a safe and supportive classroom community that incorporates effective hygiene practices.*** Building consistent, positive structures and procedures in your classroom plays an important role in ensuring all students develop a positive and healthy hygiene routine.

Charts, pictures and other reminders are key to modifying behavior! Be sure to post items in your classroom to keep effective hygiene practices—such as handwashing, coughing and sneezing into an elbow or tissue, and minimizing the touch of surfaces—in the front of students' minds. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) offer several printable posters and graphics for classroom use. Below are several additional strategies to build a positive culture of pandemic-related hygiene practices in the classroom.<sup>2</sup>

### Handwashing

- Set up a hand sanitizing station right at the entrance to your classroom. Monitor entry at high-traffic times to ensure every student uses the sanitizer upon entry.
- Use resources to help students learn the importance of handwashing. The CDC offers several [videos](#) for children and adults about proper handwashing procedures. Johns Hopkins also offers an [infographic](#) that

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information about the PA Departments of Health and Education's guidance for health and hygiene practices, see [Public Health guidance Regarding COVID-19 for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools](#).

<sup>2</sup> Several of these ideas are based upon guidance provided by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and considerations raised in the [Pennsylvania School Reopening Task Force Report](#). For additional information, please consult these resources directly.

can be useful for elementary classroom teachers. In addition, [Cincinnati Children's Hospital](#) has some helpful hygiene videos for children.

- If you have a sink in your classroom, explicitly teach, model, and reinforce [handwashing](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Increase monitoring to ensure adherence among students.
- Provide hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol in more than one obvious location in the classroom.
- In the early grades, utilize songs and poems to teach hygiene skills. For older students, pictorial reminders as well as designated times of day for handwashing are appropriate.
- Remind students to wash or sanitize hands after coughing or sneezing, and always put used tissues in the trash.

### **Minimizing Touching Faces and Surfaces**

- Minimize student movement in the classroom, and where movement around the classroom is necessary, have routines for movement that are clear to students and purposeful.
- Mask wearing helps remind us to refrain from touching our faces, however, it can still happen! To reduce students' propensity to touch their faces, encourage the use of personal fidget spinners, stress balls, or other low-cost objects that occupy hands. Ask students to practice scratching their eyes and noses using a tissue (and then immediately throwing the tissue away).
- Ask students to imagine that their hands are muddy or covered in paint. How would they scratch their nose then? Make lists of their ideas and practice them.
- Place reminders in your classroom about refraining from touching surfaces or your face.
- Point out when you make a mistake, and immediately model washing your hands, wiping a surface, or engaging in other hygiene practices to reduce the impact of your mistake.

### **Building Immunity**

- Communicate that taking care of our bodies makes them stronger. Model drinking lots of water and eating a healthy balanced diet.
- Express to students the importance of sleeping well and for at least 8 hours each night.
- Demonstrate deep breathing and other mindful practices in the classroom. Encourage students to practice mindful routines in class daily. Check PSEA's online learning resources for additional information about the importance of mindfulness for good health.
- Encourage movement and exercise in your class. Take frequent brain breaks for stretches and movement.

### **Conclusion**

Reopening school buildings during the pandemic, as many school entities are planning to do, can create anxiety for students and staff alike. However, when it comes to classroom hygiene practices, educators have an opportunity to work together to build school community and provide powerful learning opportunities for students. Working together as a school, grade level team, or content area team, educators can develop resourceful ways to encourage students to engage in appropriate hygiene practices while maintaining pro-social learning environments.

### **For more Information**

PSEA members who have specific concerns about the implementation of hygiene practices in their classrooms should contact their local union leaders or PSEA UniServ Representative. PSEA members who are seeking additional suggestions of ways to support positive experiences for students during the COVID-19 pandemic may contact PSEA's Education Services Division, [professionalllearning@psea.org](mailto:professionalllearning@psea.org).