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Dear *Colleague,*

As you are well aware, water, sanitation and hygiene-related diseases are a huge burden in developing countries. It is estimated that 88% of diarrhoeal disease is caused by unsafe water supply, and inadequate sanitation and hygiene (WHO). It is particularly, relevant to schools as many schools serve communities that have a high prevalence of diseases related to inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene, and where child malnutrition and other underlying health problems are common.

Despite the significant progress made to address the issue, key challenges remain in terms of access to quality child friendly infrastructure, capacity to influence sustained behavior change, gaps in monitoring systems that do capture quality, and functionality of water and sanitation systems, as well as effective hygiene education, etc.

Against this background, handwashing with soap is a proven, effective and inexpensive intervention against diarrhea, an all too common cause of school absenteeism. Particularly, after contact with excreta, hand washing with soap can reduce diarrhoeal diseases by over 40 per cent and respiratory infections by 30 percent. Diarrhoea and respiratory infections are the number one cause for child deaths in India.

The critical times for handwashing with soap are after using the toilet and before eating. Instilling the practice of handwashing before and after these critical events is doable. The Mid-Day Meal (MDM), which is served to nearly 110 million children in 1.3 million schools in the country, provides an excellent opportunity to influence the practice of hand washing with soap. This essential life skill once learnt at school, can then be inculcated within the household and wider community by children.

In view of the huge benefits of handwashing with soap after using the toilet and before eating, all states are requested to mainstream the activity of handwashing *with* soap by all children before the Mid Day Meal in all government run schools. This could be facilitated by:



मध्याह्न भोजन योजना  
Mid Day Meal Scheme


1. Making available soap in all schools so that all children can wash their hands with soap. The MDM guidelines vide MHRD circular number F.1-15/2009-Desk(MDM) of 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010, clearly list soap as an admissible item of expenditure to facilitate **handwashing with soap before and after eating Mid-Day Meal (MDM)**.
2. Organisation of a dedicated time within the daily time table that will allow enough time for all children, cooks and teachers in the school to wash their hands with soap simultaneously, i.e. large numbers of the school community being able to wash their hands at the same time. This is efficient as well as effective – we know that seeing others handwashing with soap is an essential element of the practice becoming a habit.
3. Wherever proper handwashing facilities are either not available or inadequate for all children buckets and mugs can be used to supplement the available facilities.
4. Comprehensive data, such as the number, quality, and functionality of water and sanitation systems is of critical importance for the design and management, and the ultimate success of WASH-in-Schools programmes. These figures must be available for wider monitoring and verification purposes.
5. Teachers and headmasters should monitor this activity on a daily basis.

All of us in the field of education have a responsibility to ensure the health and well-being of everyone in the school community – by actively inculcating this simple practice among all school children and their teachers across India, at a regular time, every day. Apart from disease prevention, Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) in schools has a profound impact on the learning and health of children, especially for girls. It is directly related not only to physical, mental and social health, but ultimately to economic and political development.

In view of the above, I shall appreciate, if you ensure hand washing with soap in the schools in your state particularly before and after critical events.

With regards

Yours sincerely



(Amarjit Singh)

All Secretaries of Education looking after MDMS  
All Directors MDMS