


September 2, 2009

To: Superintendents, Principals and Health Services Coordinators in San Joaquin County Schools

From: Karen Furst, M.D., M.P.H., Health Officer 

**RE: ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZERS IN SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY SCHOOLS**

On August 13, 2009 the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued a Health Alert Update which discussed the importance of alcohol-based hand sanitizer use in the schools in California. I concur with this CDPH recommendation and reinforce that schools in San Joaquin County should be following the CDPH guidance from that document as is outlined below.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are very effective germicides against many viruses (including influenza) and bacteria. Many schools and classrooms do not have easy access to sinks for use by the students and staff. The use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol should be promoted in schools in San Joaquin County. Use of good handwashing with soap and water or, in its absence, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers periodically throughout the day can decrease the spread of influenza and many other pathogens in the school setting. For influenza, this can lead to a decrease in the spread throughout the community and decreased absenteeism in the schools of both students and staff.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used safely in the classroom with a few simple precautions.

- Students should be taught about the importance of hand hygiene in the control of communicable diseases.
- In elementary school classrooms, alcohol-based hand sanitizers should be used under the direction of a teacher or other school employee.
- In secondary schools, alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be available in wall dispensers that are readily visible to a teacher, convenient for use by students, and able to be secured after school hours.
- Students and staff should be encouraged to use alcohol-based hand sanitizers periodically during each school day when hand washing with soap and water is not available. This includes after coughing or sneezing, toileting and before eating. One possible way to implement its use is by having students use the product each time they enter and leave the classroom.
- Schools should develop procedures to monitor the occurrence of allergic reactions to alcohol-based hand sanitizers; if a student appears to develop an allergic reaction, advise the student to discontinue using the product and instead wash hands with soap and water, and notify the school nurse and parent of the possible allergic reaction.
- Students should be taught that all alcohol-based hand sanitizer products need to be kept away from contact with the eyes, mouth, and nose.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers need to be kept away from any type of open flame or where sparks could be generated; smokers should not light a cigarette until their hands are completely dry after use.