

Handwashing Nudges

A tool to encourage student handwashing in schools and reduce transmission of COVID-19

The long walk from the toilet stall to the handwashing station in a classroom in Zamboanga del Norte
 ©IDinsight/Nhu Le

DEFINITION

Nudges are changes to choices presented “that alters people’s behavior in a predictable way”.¹ For example, a school cafeteria may place fruit at eye-level in order to encourage, or “nudge,” students to consume healthier snacks. Handwashing nudges seek to nudge students to wash hands. They can trigger people to wash hands unconsciously, or serve as a reminder.

In 2019-2020, UNICEF and IDinsight tested a package handwashing nudges in public elementary schools in the Philippines—and found impressive results:

Additionally, nudges were **relatively cheap, easy to install, and well-liked** by interviewed principals, teachers, and students.



Nudges improved handwashing rates by 17.3 percentage points



Nudges increased availability of water and soap by 20.2 percentage points



The nudges most likely increased water and soap availability, most likely by encouraging teachers to replenish water and soap more consistently²

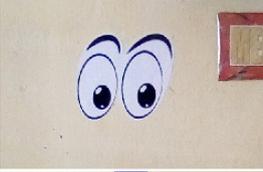
Estimated Cost³
₱571 | \$11.07
per Classroom



PHP (₱), USD (\$)

PACKAGE OF NUDGES

We strongly recommend that you install all the nudges as a package, to maximize their impact. The nudges were tested as a package, and selective installation of the nudges may decrease their effectiveness.

Nudge		Purpose
	Painted footpath with spray-painted footprints from toilet stall to handwashing area	To prompt students to head to handwashing station rather than straight back to their seat after toilet use
	Set of handwashing posters, which are changed monthly, at the back of the toilet stall door	To remind students to wash hands with soap <i>immediately</i> after toilet use, combatting forgetfulness and delivering simple motivating messages about cleanliness and fitting in with peers
	“Watching eyes” sticker above water source of handwashing area	To simulate the feeling of being watched, which research indicates can create social pressure and encourage people to wash hands
	Arrow sticker pointing to soap dish by handwashing area	To carve out a visual space for handwashing, reminding students to wash hands with soap and reminding teachers to provide soap

Given these positive results and the urgency of the current public health situation, we encourage all interested school leaders and educators to consider installing nudges at school bathrooms with consistent water and soap access.

We provide a complete installation guide, along with all necessary templates, for anyone around the world to self-install our tested package of handwashing nudges on our website.

We hope that this guide will help ensure safer learning environments for students everywhere. Please share your installations with us through email or social media, as we would love to see them!

Contact Us

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About IDinsight: IDinsight helps leaders combat poverty worldwide by designing, deploying and promoting evidence-generating tools. We tailor the best methodologies to partner needs and constraints to fuse evidence with action. We serve governments, NGOs, foundations and social businesses across Africa and Asia in all major program areas including health, education, agriculture, livelihoods, and governance.

About UNICEF: UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories to protect the rights of every child. UNICEF has spent 70 years working to improve the lives of children and their families.

About USAID: The U.S. Agency for International Development administers the U.S. foreign assistance program providing economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 80 countries worldwide.

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¹ Thaler & Sunstein, 2008. *Nudge Theory*. Yale University Press.

² Some classrooms in the study did not have running water. In such classrooms, students washed hands using water from a bucket and soap, and teachers were typically the ones responsible for providing and replenishing the communal water and soap.

³ The estimated cost is based on cost of supplies in Zamboanga del Norte in the Philippines. The conversion rate utilized here is PHP 50.7 = USD 1.