

Handwashing Nudges Installation Guide

User Note

Handwashing with soap is one of the most effective practices¹ for reducing a variety of respiratory, gastrointestinal, and infectious diseases—including COVID-19.² In order to maintain safe learning environments and prevent the spread of COVID-19, it's critical that schools build hand hygiene habits among their students; however, as any educator knows, it can be difficult to get students, especially younger students, to build healthy habits.


Handwashing is a particularly tricky behavior to shift, because we are trying to build a daily habit where the costs (inconvenience) are clear and immediate, but the benefits (avoidance of disease) only accrue later, in a diffused way that is difficult to perceive. Children specifically find it difficult weigh decisions that affect their future.³

Luckily, behavioral economics has provided an additional tool: **Behavioral Nudges**.

Nudges are a change (often environmental) to choices presented “that alters people’s behavior in a predictable way”.⁴ For example, a school cafeteria may place fruit at eye-level in order to encourage, or “nudge,” students to consume healthier snacks.

Previous research has shown we can apply the power of nudges towards handwashing as well. In studies in the United State⁵, Bangladesh⁶, and Vietnam⁷, handwashing nudges meaningfully increased handwashing rates among children and adults.

UNICEF and IDinsight recently tested handwashing nudges in public elementary schools in the Philippines—and we found impressive results:



Nudges improved handwashing rates by 17.3 percentage points (pp) In grades 1-6 classrooms without nudges, pupils washed their hands with soap 11.7 percent of the time after using the toilet. In classrooms with nudges, pupils washed their hands after toilet use 29.0 percent of the time after toilet-use.

Nudges increased availability of water and soap at handwashing stations near toilets by 38 percent. In many of these classrooms, students washed their hands with water from a bucket and soap that teachers were responsible for replenishing. Because of this mechanism for providing water and soap, this suggests that nudges most likely increased soap and water availability by **reminding teachers to replenish water and soap more consistently in their classrooms**. The nudges were well-liked by interviewed principals, teachers, and students at schools where they were installed.

Best of all, the handwashing nudges were relatively **inexpensive** (we estimate in the Philippines it would cost PHP 561 or USD 11.07 per classroom)⁸ and **easy** to install.

Given these positive results and the urgency of the current public health situation, we are providing this installation guide—complete with all necessary templates—for self-installing our tested package of handwashing nudges to school officials and teachers around the world. We hope this will be useful as they consider installing nudges in school bathrooms with consistent water and soap access.⁹

Please note, however, that these nudges were designed for relatively low-resource elementary school classrooms in the Philippines, and evaluated positively within that context. Your classrooms may have different layouts and resources; your students may have different cultural backgrounds and habits. We have provided some guidance in this guide for adapting the nudges to better suit your needs, but we cannot guarantee the exact impact the nudges may have in your classrooms. Nonetheless, the evidence is strong enough that we wish to provide you with the option of installing handwashing nudges.

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

Contact Us

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1 Aiello, A. E., et al. 2008. Effect of Hand Hygiene on Infectious Disease Risk in the Community Setting: A Meta-Analysis. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(8), 1372–1381.
2 Pogrebna, G. & Kharlamov, A. (2020). The Impact of Cross-Cultural Differences in Handwashing Patterns on the COVID-19 Outbreak Magnitude. 10.13140/RG.2.2.23764.96649.
3 Yurgelun-Todd D. Emotional and cognitive changes during adolescence. *Current opinion in neurobiology*. 2007;17(2):251-7. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17383865>. Accessed June 11, 2011.
4 Thaler & Sunstein, 2008. *Nudge Theory*. Yale University Press.
5 Blackwell, Calvin, Daniela Goya-Tocchetto, and Zack Sturman. "Nudges in the restroom: How handwashing can be impacted by environmental cues." *Journal of Behavioral Economics for Policy* 2.2 (2018): 41-47
6 Grover, Elise, et al. "Comparing the behavioural impact of a nudge-based handwashing intervention to high-intensity hygiene education: a cluster-randomised trial in rural Bangladesh." *Tropical Medicine and International Health* 23.1 (2018): 10-25.
7 Ljung, P. & Ha, H. (2017). Nudging a Handwashing Habit.
8 The conversion rate here and throughout this policy brief is PHP 50.7 = USD 1.
9 This is the minimum requirement for bathrooms to be suitable for the handwashing nudges. For a complete list of recommended characteristics the bathroom should have, please see the Guide to Adapting Nudges.