

How to Sensitize Children to Adopt Coronavirus Preventive Measures?

Amul is a seven-year-old child studying in Grade-2 in a municipal corporation school in Delhi. He is a sociable person. He loves to hang out with his friends and asks innumerable questions to his best friend Yasmin when they have mid-day meal together. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, his school is closed. He keeps on staring at the door of his house and looks forward to asking so many questions to his best friend when the school reopens.

This time when the school reopens after a long vacation, Yasmin may not have all the answers to Amul's questions because children in primary classes would be learning new things hitherto untouched or not discussed previously. She will also be one of the thousands of children who will be told about new norms in the school when she goes back to the school after a while.

Children's Habit

Teachers in the schools are wary of the fact that children's habits involve touching their faces, biting or picking at nails, nose or sores. Chewing pencils or clothing is also common. But why do they like to behave in such ways?



Nose Picking



Face Touching

The Australian website raisingchildren.net.au on parenting says that the habit can be comforting to children like sucking their thumb to sleep as infants at the baby stage. Children at a later stage entertain themselves when they get bored with activities like biting their nails while watching TV. Sometimes, there can also be practical reasons like young children with cold often pick their noses to clear them. Generally, such habits go away when they grow up. However, these habits can harm a child in the present pandemic therefore intervention becomes necessary.



Eye Rubbing

How to Sensitize Children?

In the schools, a primary teacher can gently remind a child about such a habit. She/he can also engage them in some activities as distractors, but the best is the appreciation when

children pay attention to their teachers and break undesirable habits. Children with special needs may require additional support to break such unsafe habits.

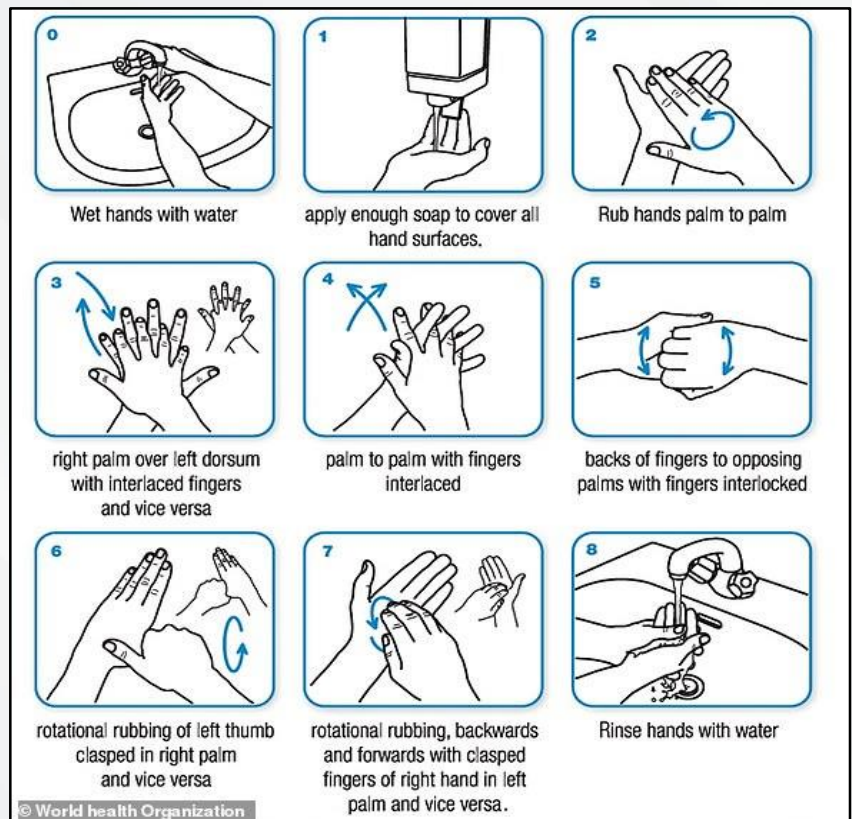
Protective Measures

The National Curriculum Framework-2005 Position Paper on Health and Physical Education states that ‘although hygiene and health education find a place in the school curriculum in some states, the emphasis is not laid on their practical aspect’. In the COVID-19 situation, the practical side of hygiene and health of children and teachers in schools has become a necessity. Experts have suggested several protective measures and most of them can be demonstrated easily by the teachers. Let’s discuss protective measures in detail.

Hand Washing

World Health Organization (WHO) says that hand hygiene is one of the most effective actions one can take to reduce the spread of pathogens and prevent infections, including the COVID-19 virus.

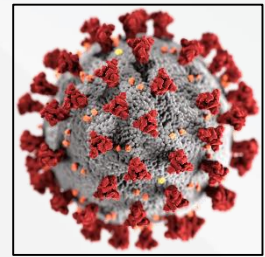
National Public Radio (NPR), a leading public broadcast service in the United States says that, make sure that the children understand that hand washing isn’t optional. It emphasizes the need to demonstrate how to use soap, water and *time*. Washing should take at least 20 seconds so we need to help



them find a song/rhyme they like to sing like “Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star”, “ABC Song”, “Chaar Chane”, “Aaloo Kachalu” and others. They need to wash their hands when they come in from outside, before eating, after coughing or sneezing or blowing their nose and after using the bathroom. Teachers can give points to children and praise them for making

the correct way of handwashing a habit. Fingernails are also needed to be clipped because it can be an easy hiding spot for the COVID-19 virus.

While explaining the process of handwashing, teachers also need to inform children what happens to coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 when it comes in contact with the soap solution. It's easy to explain to them that the virus contains an outer lipid layer that dissolves by the soap solution. It can be shown effectively through YouTube video- how soap kills the virus at <https://youtu.be/-LKVUarhtvE>.



SARS-CoV-2

No Face Touching

A BBC article says that our species is one of the few in the animal kingdom known to touch their faces regularly, and often without even realising. Since touching chins and the areas around the mouth, nose and eyes is a recipe for COVID-19 quick transmission, there is no option but to set these as unacceptable practices among children as well as adults even if it's difficult to easily adopt. Various modes of awareness like storytelling, poem recitation, play, mono-acting, video show or PowerPoint presentation by teachers can be used to raise awareness among the children that face touching can harm them. Similarly, games can be designed to see how many times children touch their face. The student with the least number of touches wins the game.

Sneezing into Elbows

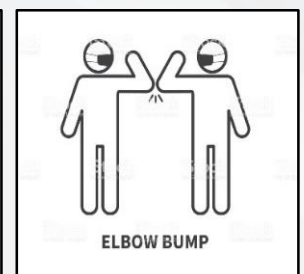
COVID-19 virus is transmitted through person to person contact through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Therefore, children ideally should adopt a habit of coughing or sneezing into their elbows. Covering the nose and mouth at the time of sneezing and coughing should be appreciated and encouraged since it contains the droplets effectively.



Sneezing in Elbows

Elbow Bump

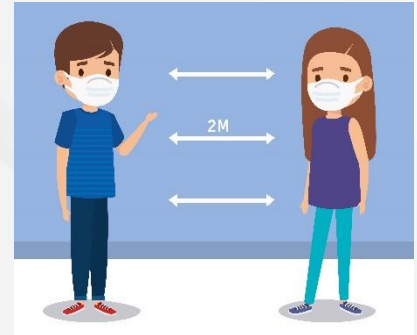
Handshake is a globally accepted greeting and parting tradition but it's not considered healthy now as the transmission of the virus from one hand to another can be deadly for individual. So the alternative is 'elbow bump' or a distant Namaste greeting. In these ways there is minimal, or no touch involved.



Maintain Social Distancing

Children need to be shown how to maintain a safe distance of 2 metres with other persons including their close friends within and outside classrooms. Teachers should also share their experiences about how they are keeping distance to stay safe. Children can be invited to give suggestions on -how to maintain social distancing?

Teachers have the central role in sensitizing children to follow protective measures against coronavirus, involve their parents in promoting hygienic practices at home and also reaching out to the children in distress.



Reaching Out

Teachers should encourage children to talk if they feel upset, uncomfortable or scared due to the pandemic or anything else. They should also be vigilant if a child shows any sign of suffering like being withdrawn, secretive, etc. In case, symptoms like sore throat, fever or discomfort in breathing among any child are detected, the doctor or the nearest hospital should be immediately contacted. If teachers reach out to the vulnerable and sick child, other children learn empathy and act with compassion with their classmates and others. In many schools, Social, Emotional and Ethical (SEE) learning is also introduced so that children can imbibe and practice basic human values.

Role of Parents

Teachers need to engage with the parents so that children's need of positive conversation and empathy can be safeguarded within their family. It's important that children are heard as they look for support and reassurance from parents and other family members. Their feelings should be accepted and they should be provided with comfort. Praise may be used to make them feel good about themselves in these stressful times.

When school reopens, laundering of school uniforms, backpacks and proper cleaning of water bottles requires frequent action to avoid the spread of virus. When children come back from schools their shoes can be taken off at the entrance of their homes and they should be encouraged to properly wash their hands first. These simple but effective actions can save lives.

Teacher's Preparation

It's obvious that children in school will be asking so many questions on COVID-19 and new norms like why I need to wash hands again and again? Why wearing mask is important?,

Why practice social distancing?, What to do when someone tests COVID-19 positive, etc. Teachers require tremendous preparation to answer these questions.

As the first step, teachers can create a handy diary by writing expected questions of students and answers based on scientific knowledge. The websites of [World Health Organization](#) , [Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India](#) and the [United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) are useful resources for such preparation.

As the second step, teachers can download, comprehend, show and distribute their students some interesting resources like comics created by Malaka Gharib <https://www.kqed.org/arts/13875678/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus> and by Weiman Know, <https://www.comicsforgood.com/weimankow/how-covid-19-spreads> or a video <https://youtu.be/Oj1azO0mXvE> created by MoHFW.

Teachers as Warriors

Using multipronged strategies, teachers are on the forefront to sensitize children to follow protective measures against coronavirus. Armed with the deep understanding about the current pandemic, they are the true warriors walking extra mile to mitigate challenges posed by a virus within and outside their schools. With this preparation, let's hope, children, school and society will be back to normal and safe soon. It'll also be an opportunity for Amul and Yasmin to continue pondering upon their questions during their mid-day meals when their school reopens.

About the Author



Asif Akhtar is a Faculty, Environmental Studies at In-Service Teacher Education Institute, Delhi. He has a teaching, research, curriculum development, field measurement, mentorship, and leadership experience in his two decades of career in the education sector. He likes reading and writing on science education and teacher education. His other interests are future technologies and cartooning.

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