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## **Study on personal hygiene practices among school going children in district Udhampur, Jammu and Kashmir, India**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of present study is to investigate the personal hygiene practices among school going children. In the present study, sample size of 518 school going children from class 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> were randomly selected from three different government schools of district Udhampur. The sample included 313 female and 205 male. The data was collected through personal interview. The results revealed that 61.46 percent boys and 92.33 per cent girls were taking bath daily. Though 90.35 percent children brushed their teeth once a day but only 9.65 percent reported that they brushed their teeth twice a day which should be practiced by all. Only 75.09% children used to wash hands before meals among which only 17.99% used soap while cleaning hands. 41.12% children were still following open defecation practice which is a matter of concern. School children should be encouraged to practice good personal hygienic practices as good hygiene habits in childhood are a great foundation for good hygiene in the teenage years.

**Keywords:** personal hygiene, school going children, Uttarakhand.

### **Introduction**

Personal hygiene is the practice that leads to body cleanliness and good personal appearance or simply personal grooming. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the main determinants of health include the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and the person's individual characteristics and behaviour. Personal hygiene is the practice of maintaining cleanliness of the body, it is done through bathing, hair grooming, and hand washing, brushing teeth, trimming nails and cleaning ears among others.

The practices in personal hygiene contribute to good health. Personal hygiene helps in protection against some of the infectious diseases such as typhoid, cholera and dysentery. The practice of hand washing is often forgotten by many people yet it is one of the ways to prevent a plethora of diseases and disorders from developing. Use of unclean hands may make one, for example, contract diseases such as cholera or diarrhea. The hands should always be washed thoroughly before eating or preparing the meals so as to avoid contamination of the meals and hence minimize the development of the diseases related to the same. Furthermore, the act of washing the hair or shaving the hair helps to minimize some of the diseases such as the dandruffs. Untidy hair is always a hiding and breeding place for lice and these should be well treated to prevent spreading and consequently affect others especially in the learning institutions or the family members. Generally, the skin plays a significant role in protecting the body against infections. For this reason, the skin should be cleaned regularly so as to keep it clean and stronger enough to fight infections and effectively protect the body. During the perspirations for example, the sweats contain urea which end up as deposits on the skin surface thus necessitating the cleaning of the skin through bathing. Some of the skin diseases such as the athlete's foot could be prevented by proper hygiene (Sivarethnamohan, 2010) [5].

Brushing of the teeth is equally significant health wise. The teeth should be brushed at least after every meal. This helps in preventing teeth decay and other dental infections such as gingivitis and periodontal diseases. Such diseases are responsible or may contribute to halitosis. Besides the teeth, in most cases the finger nails also form hiding sites for germs causing diseases. The debris under the unclean fingernails contains microbes that lead

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to development of diseases. Open defecation which is the act of relieving oneself in the open or inappropriately disposing of excreta is a public health concern. Over one billion people engage in this practice worldwide contributing to many problems, including water contamination and the spread of diseases leading to among other things, childhood malnutrition. Furthermore, 2.5 billion individuals do not use improved sanitation facilities, which "ensure the hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact" and prevent contamination of the local environment. Poor sanitation and hygiene have been linked to specific negative health outcomes, including diarrheal disease. (Alexander *et al*, 2016) [2]. It is well known that personal behavior is very important to gain social acceptance. However maintaining good or acceptable personal hygiene is seldom perceived and acknowledged as protection against diseases and good hygiene habits in childhood are a great foundation for good hygiene in the teenage years. (Asha, 2013 and Farah *et al*, 2015) [1, 4]. Keeping all this in mind the present study was conducted to assess the personal hygiene practices among school going children.

## Materials and Methods

In the present study sample size of 518 school going children from class 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> were randomly selected from three

different government schools of district Udham Singh Nagar. The sample included 313 female and 205 males. The age group of study participants ranged between 11 to 18 years. A questionnaire was formulated for the study having questions related with practices and knowledge about the hygiene and sanitation which includes questions related with general practices of personal hygiene. The data was collected through personal interview.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 inferred the information about the personal hygiene related behavior among school going children. It was found that 80.11 per cent children were taking bath daily among which per cent of girls (92.33%) was higher as compared to boys (61.46%). Study conducted by Farah *et al* (2013) [4] reported that 81% of their sample took bath daily. Per cent of children taking bath on alternate days was 18.91 whereas only 0.96% children were taking bath weekly. Regarding hair washing practice it was observed that 22.97% children washed their hairs daily, 36.29% children washed their hair on alternate days, 27.80% washed them twice a week and 12.93% children were washing their hair weekly. Overall 90.35% children brushed their teeth once a day whereas rest of the children i.e 9.65% brushed their teeth twice a day.

**Table 1:** Hygiene and sanitary practices among school going children by gender

Characteristics	Male n (%)205	Female n (%)313	Total n (%)518
Bathing			
Daily	126 (61.46%)	289 (92.33%)	415 (80.11%)
Alternate days	74 (36.09%)	24 (07.67%)	98 (18.91%)
Weekly	05 (02.43%)	-	05 (0.96%)
Hair Washing			
Daily	110 (53.65%)	09 (02.87%)	119 (22.97%)
Alternate days	74 (36.09%)	114 (36.42%)	188 (36.29%)
Twice a week	16 (07.80%)	128 (40.89%)	144(27.80%)
Weekly	05 (02.45%)	62 (19.81%)	67 (12.93%)
Brushing Teeth			
Once a day	189 (92.19%)	279 (89.14%)	468 (90.35%)
Twice a day	16 (07.80%)	34 (10.86%)	50 (9.65%)
Hand washing before meal			
Yes	144 (70.24%)	245 (78.27%)	389 (75.09%)
With soap	22 (15.28%)	48 (19.59%)	70 (17.99%)
Without soap	122 (84.72%)	197 (80.41%)	319 (82.01%)
No	61 (29.76%)	68 (21.72%)	129 (24.90%)
Washing school uniform			
Daily	40 (19.51%)	57 (18.21%)	97 (18.72%)
Alternate days	59 (28.78%)	92 (29.39%)	151 (29.15%)
Twice a week	65 (31.71%)	112 (35.78%)	177 (34.17%)
Weekly	41 (20%)	52 (16.61%)	93 (17.95%)
Open defecation practice			
Yes	92 (44.88%)	121 (38.66%)	213 (41.12%)
No	113 (55.12%)	192 (61.34%)	305 (58.88%)

It was observed that 75. 09% children washed their hands before taking meal among which only 17.99% children washed their hands with soap. Similar study conducted by Anitha Rani and Sathiyasekaran (2013) [3] on school going children in Chennai also revealed that 76.8% children always washed their hands before taking meals. In the present study, it was also found that 24.90% children do not wash their hands before taking meals which should not be practiced. Regarding practice of washing school uniform it was observed that 18.72% children washed their school uniform daily, 29.15% washed on alternate days, and 34.17% washed

their uniform twice a week and 17.95% washed their uniform weekly.

It was observed that large number of sample were still following practice of open defecation i.e 41.12 per cent. It was seen that 58.88 per cent students do not practice open defecation. It was evident from table 1 that more number of boys (44.88%) were following the practice of open defecation in comparison to girls (38.66%).

## Conclusion

Good hygiene practices are very important to maintain good

health. It is very important to develop good hygiene habits in childhood as childhood years are a great foundation for good hygiene in later years of life. In the present study, it was seen that personal hygiene practices of school going children in government schools of Udhampur Singh Nagar district are not appropriate. Use of soap while washing hands is very important but only 75.09% children used to wash hands before meals among which only 17.99% used soap while cleaning hands. Overall it was found that girls practiced good personal hygiene habits in comparison to boys. Difference was observed in daily bathing practices among boys and girls. 92.33% girls took bath daily whereas only 61.46% boys were taking bath daily. It was very sad to see that large number of children (41.12%) were still following open defecation practice which is a matter of concern. The reason for bad hygienic practices among the children might be the low socioeconomic background, less education in the family and lack of awareness. Maintaining good or acceptable personal hygiene is seldom perceived and acknowledged as protection against diseases. Hence the school children should be encouraged to practice good personal hygienic practices.

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