

## SOAPER STARS: HAND-HYGIENE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN ON PAEDIATRIC WARDS

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This study reports on the effectiveness of an educational intervention, implemented on paediatric wards, consisting of hand-hygiene resources centred on superhero type characters. Handwashing is one of the most cost-effective infection prevention interventions. Public Health Campaigns have sought to emphasise the importance of handwashing, in order to prevent the spreading of illnesses (particularly in recent times during the height of the Covid pandemic), yet there are few campaigns aimed at young children. In addition, research has shown that interventions need to be motivational and not just the transferring of knowledge in order to change behaviour in children. [1, 2 & 3]

### THE INTERVENTION

The **Soaper Stars** are a group of 'hygiene superheroes' created to help children understand the 'why, when and how' of handwashing. Boxes of products (soap, hand gel, wipes) featuring the characters, along with an activity sheet and posters are presented to children on paediatric wards, with the aim of encouraging them to wash their hands, and to learn about why it is necessary.



### METHODS

- **Mixed-method approach.**
- **Observations** of NHS healthcare staff and children engaging with the resources and products.
- **Interviews/questionnaires** with NHS healthcare staff regarding their experiences of using the resources to evaluate if the resources had supported them in their infection prevention role, and to determine if there had been a change in children's handwashing practices.
- NHS ethical approval from HRA.

### PRELIMINARY RESULTS

To date, two hospital study sites have been completed, with another three taking place over the coming months.

- Observations demonstrate that **housekeepers are essential** to effectively implement the hand washing products.
- Generally, **parents are not encouraging the use of hospital wipes** prior to eating.
- Preliminary results indicate **good engagement with the educational intervention and increased usage of hand-hygiene products and frequency.**
- Initial findings from healthcare staff questionnaires show that one of the **key factors that affect children's handwashing** are **parents' encouragement** (data collection is on-going).

"PARENTS ARE THE KEY. IF YOU CAN GET THEM ON BOARD, THEY CAN BE AN ENABLER"

"MUCH EASIER TO GET THE CHILDREN TO WASH THEIR HANDS - THEY WERE EXCITED TO GET THE BOXES!"

### CONCLUSION

There are limited children's handwashing resources for use in paediatric settings, yet learning good handwashing practice is fundamental to their health. Being invisible to the naked-eye, it is hard for young children to understand the association between these pathogenic microbes and feeling unwell. Bridging this gap in knowledge is essential. Children on paediatric wards are more likely to have suppressed immune systems and thus limiting the spread of infectious disease within such wards is paramount to children's health. The educational intervention to date has encouraged good hand-hygiene practice, with data showing an increase in hand-hygiene frequency.



#### References:

- [1] Watson, J. et al. (2019) Child's play: Harnessing play and curiosity motives to improve child handwashing in a humanitarian setting. International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health. 222 (2) P, 177-182.  
 [2] Crosby, S., Laird, K. and Younie, S. (2019) Interactive health-hygiene education for early years: the creation and evaluation of learning resources to improve understanding of handwashing practice. International Journal of Early Years Education. DOI: 10.1080/09669760.2019.1628010. [3] Younie, S., Mitchell, C., Bisson, M-J., Crosby, S., Kukona, A. and Laird, K. (2020) Improving young children's handwashing behaviour and understanding of germs: The impact of A Germ's Journey educational resources in schools and public spaces. PLoS ONE, 15 (11): e0242134