

# Absenteeism is Expensive: Do the Math

Approximately 1/5 of the population attends or works in schools.

(U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics, 1999, NCES 2000-031, Washington, C.D. 2000.)

When illness occurs, the cash register of “lost days and dollars” starts to ring!

## Check it out: the teacher tally

- o Teacher illness costs time and money. In fact, teachers can be sick more days per year than students: An average of 5.3 days a year due to illness, whereas students are absent 4.5 days a year.  
(Ohlund LS, Ericsson KB. Elementary school achievement and absence due to illness. Journal of General Psychology. 1994;155:409-421)
- o Sample Equation: Number of teacher sick days per year x the daily fee for a substitute = your school’s cost for teacher illness.

## Check it out: the student tally

- o Student absenteeism affects achievement. It not only puts the sick students behind, but often makes other students have to “wait” for them to catch up.
- o Students don’t wash their hands often or well. In one study, only 58% of female and 48% of male middle and high school students washed their hands after using the bathroom.
  - o And of these, only 33% of the females and 8% of the males used soap.  
(Guinan ME, McGuckin-Guinan M, Severeid A. Who washes hands after using the bathroom? American Journal of Infection Control. 1997;24(5):424-425.)
- o 52.2 million cases of the common cold affect Americans under the age of 17 each year.  
(CDC, 1996. [www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/colds.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/colds.htm))

### Costs in Time and Money

Administration:  
*Paying substitute teachers*

Teachers:  
*Re-teaching absent students*

Parents:  
*Worry, lost work days, and additional health care expenses with an ill child at home*

Food Service:  
*Decreased participation in school meals*

## Ka-Ching! It costs more to NOT wash!

- o While commitment to handwashing means commitment of time and supplies, the costs of NOT washing are far greater than the cost of washing.

In short: these germs are gross, and they’re running rampant. So who wouldn’t want to keep them from spreading? Your first step is to get your students motivated to create a school-wide campaign to promote good, old-fashioned clean hands. And it’s so easy, you can begin today.



The information contained on this page was compiled by The Soap and Detergent Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Health and Human Services. This information is not copyrighted and is intended for educational purposes only.



Handwashing Tool Kit, A Collaborative Project of the Minnesota Food Safety Partnership, the US Food and Drug Administration, and the Minnesota Department of Health, 2006