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Industry News

New Program Launched to Promote Hand Hygiene for College Students

A new program to promote proper hand hygiene has just been introduced by Pro-Link, Inc., a jansan marketing and buying group based in Canton, MA.

Unlike similar programs developed by private and government organizations, the Pro-Link program is targeted specifically at college students.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, lax hand hygiene contributes to infections that kill nearly 100,000 Americans every year.

Recent studies at Kansas State and North Carolina State universities have found this to be a very serious problem among college-aged students for two key reasons:

- The greater concern about H1N1 and other public health diseases targeting young people, especially college students
- The fact that many college-age students still do not practice proper hand hygiene even though they report that they do

The researchers observed that even during a high-profile disease outbreak when cross contamination was high, students followed recommended hand hygiene procedures just 17 percent of the time.*

“This is a problem that our industry can help change,” says Diane Mahana, marketing manager for Pro-Link. “Not only is it a health issue; it’s an education issue. Illness negatively affects academic performance.”**

Some of the initiatives of the program include these:

- Encouraging college administrators to make wellness a priority on their campuses
- Placing hand sanitizer dispensers wherever there is student traffic, especially in places where wash stations are not available
- Making hand hygiene dispensers readily available outside of restroom doors, by shared computer keyboards, telephones, pencil sharpeners, and other high-touch areas

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- Encouraging the installation and use of factory sealed soap dispensing systems instead of refillable soap dispensers

“This last item is especially noteworthy,” adds Mahana. “Twenty-five percent of refillable bulk soap containers contain unsafe levels of contamination. Instead of protecting their health, these [refillable] systems may actually be the source of illness.”***

Mahana adds that proper hand hygiene for college-age students is achievable, “we just have to give it more of a push.”

* The study was published in the September 2009 issue of the Journal of Environmental Health. Key researchers were Douglas Powell, an associate professor of food safety at Kansas State University, and Ben Chapman, an assistant professor at North Carolina State University.

** American College Health Association, National College Health Assessment Reference Group Executive Summary, Spring 2006.

*** Study conducted by Dr. Charles Gerba, University of Arizona, 2006.

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