

Practical activities: Glitter spread

This practical activity will demonstrate how microbes are transferred from person to person, either via direct physical contact or indirect contact with hard surfaces and other objects. The passing on of infectious disease is called transmission. Glitter gel (figure 1) is used to represent the microbes present on the hands after sneezing, touching the nose and mouth or touching a contaminated surface.

The class could be split into two groups and should sit in two separate circles. One learner from each group should apply a teaspoon of glitter gel to their hand as if they had just sneezed (figure 2). One of these learners should wash their hands immediately the other should not. Once both have returned to their circle the chosen learner should take a piece of everyday equipment e.g. a ruler or pencil and they should handle it. Then the object should be passed from person to person around the whole group. After it has returned to the original source all the learners should then carefully examine their hands and the object (figure 3). The group with the learner who did not wash their hands should see how much glitter has spread amongst the group. The results should be compared to the group whose volunteer did wash their hands at the start. This illustrates how important handwashing is in the prevention of disease transmission.

Alternative practical activities could involve one person with “contaminated” hands shaking hands with one person who then shakes hands with another and so on around the class and then transmission checked at the end. Paper could also be handed around or given out and inspected (figure 4).

This activity can also be used to judge the efficacy of current handwashing techniques as it allows learners to see any areas of the hands that retain glitter after application and initial washing. This may indicate areas where extra attention should be paid in future. Current advice on handwashing is available from NHS Scotland.

It is important to only use glitter gel suitable for use on the body and to avoid contact with the eyes. Take into account any skin conditions/allergies and ensure that the activity is age appropriate. For further advice refer to the updated ASE publication “Be Safe” or contact



Figure 1: Glitter gel suitable for use on skin



Figure 2: Hand coated in a glitter

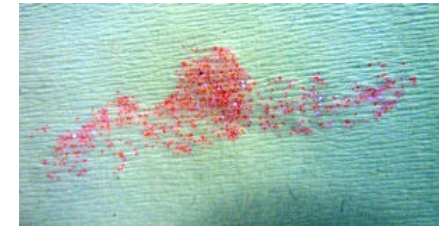


Figure 4: Paper touched by unwashed hand

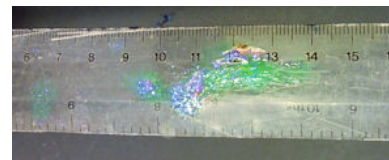


Figure 3: Ruler passed by unwashed hand