



**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department is to make a positive, significant and measurable difference in the environmental, physical and mental health, safety and well being of our community.

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

What to Do About MRSA in Schools 1

Ten Ways to Reduce Your Schools Waste 2

Cool Recycling Programs for Schools 2

New Food Scrap Collection Program for Schools 3

Integrated Pest Management Resources 4

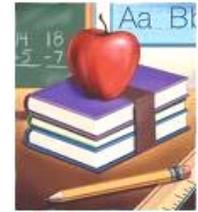
Clean Hands, Healthy People: Creating a School Environment that Promotes Good Hand Hygiene 5

School Programs – Lip Balm, Bingo, and Label Reading 6

*“Hand washing is the single most important means of preventing the spread of infection.”*

~ CDC

# School Links



SPRING 2008

THURSTON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

## What to Do About MRSA in Schools

**What is MRSA?**

MRSA (Mur-sa) is a type of “staph” infection that is resistant to many antibiotics and most often causes skin infections.

**What do MRSA skin infections look like?**

Often a MRSA infection is described as a spider bite, a boil, abscess or turf burn.

**How is MRSA spread?**

MRSA skin infections are generally spread by skin-to-skin contact or by direct contact with the infected wound drainage. MRSA may also be spread by contact with contaminated surfaces or things such as sports equipment or personal hygiene items. MRSA skin infections are not spread through the air.

**How do you prevent and control the spread of MRSA?**

Washing hands frequently is the single most important way to reduce the spread of MRSA; if water is not available, you can also use 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Have students report



any suspicious skin infection to the school nurse. Make sure any exposed wounds are covered with a clean, dry bandage taped on all 4 sides. Avoid contact with skin infection of others and do not share personal items. Wipe down shared surfaces such as desks, keyboards, phones and light switches regularly. Shared sports and athletic equipment and mats should be sanitized daily. Sharing of personal use items is strongly discouraged.

**Do schools need to report MRSA infections to the Health Department?**

MRSA is not a condition that is reportable. It is not an emergency situation. Whenever there is an outbreak (3 or more MRSA skin infections in one classroom or 3 or more MRSA skin infections on a sports team), we are available for consultation on control measures you can take. You can call 360-786-5470 and leave a message. A disease control staff member will call you back during regular working hours. You can also check out our website at

[www.co.thurston.wa.us/health](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health)

**What would happen then?**

Closure of school would NOT be a recommendation from the Health Department. We may recommend a letter be sent home to parents of the students in the classroom or athletic team with guidance on how to prevent or reduce the spread of MRSA to others. We would also provide the school with specific recommendations to prevent or reduce the spread of MRSA to others.

**What resources are available?**

Please see the excellent information provided by the Tacoma- Pierce County Health Department. The “What to do about MRSA in middle/high schools” and “What to do about MRSA in elementary schools” toolkits contain specific infection control guidelines and educational materials for the prevention of the spread of MRSA in the school setting and athletic department. To find these toolkits, go to [tpchd.org](http://tpchd.org) and place “MRSA” in the search function.

## Ten Ways to Reduce Your School's Waste

1. Conduct a classroom or school waste audit to see what you are throwing away, and which items could be reused, recycled, composted or avoided all together.
2. Start sorting out recyclables and compostables in your cafeteria, kitchen and break room.
3. Organize an end of the year collection of reusable school supplies.
4. Educate students and parents about packing waste-free lunches.
5. Eliminate unnecessary forms. Redesign them to fit on a half sheet or make them double-sided.
6. Set your computers to default to print double-sided.
7. Proof documents on screen before printing, decrease the size of the margins and adjust text size and spacing to reduce the number of pages needed.
8. Call or mail postcards to senders asking that your name be removed from junk mail lists.
9. Save and distribute electronic copies to avoid unnecessary printing.
10. Have classes/students adopt a section of school property and pledge to keep it litter-free throughout the year.



## Cool Recycling Programs for Schools

Get students, staff and the community involved in collecting some additional materials for recycling or reuse. It's fun, easy, and your school can even make some money or help raise money for a charity!



### Cartridges for Kids®

Cartridges for Kids® is an environmentally friendly program that pays cash for recyclable items. Participation in their program helps protect the environment by keeping these

items out of landfills and helps to preserve our natural resources. They pay cash to schools for used inkjet, laser, fax, copier cartridges, cell phones, laptops, PDAs and iPods. Visit <http://www.cartridgesforkids.com/> for more information.

### Elmer's glue bottle and stick recycling program

Elmer's Products Inc., the glue manufacturer, has launched a school-based glue bottle and glue stick recycling program. Throughout the school year, participating classrooms will collect empty glue bottles and glue sticks to be recycled. Once a box is full, teachers seal it, label it as instructed, and drop it off at any Wal-Mart store between Earth Day,



April 22, 2008, and the end of the school year. Teachers can receive additional information at the Elmer's Glue Crew Recycling Program Web site, <http://www.elmersgluecrew.com>.

### TerraCycle Drink Pouch and Wrapper Brigade Programs

Every year millions of drink pouches and used wrappers end up in garbage and landfills. TerraCycle and Honest Kids are working together to change that. As an eco-friendly innovator, TerraCycle is going to convert the used drink pouches and wrappers into unique fashion bags, accessories and other products. Schools can earn up to \$.02 for each pouch or wrapper for a charity of their choice. Visit <http://www.terracycle.net/brigades/> for more information.

## New Food Scrap Collection Program for Schools

Is your school looking for a way to save some money on your trash disposal bill, be more earth-friendly or create more real-world, hands-on learning experiences for students? If so, Thurston County would like to introduce a new program available to you called Food to Flowers.

Thurston County Solid Waste, in conjunction with LeMay Enterprises, has set up a program to collect compostable material from larger generators of food waste including schools. Since food scrap collection is less expensive than trash collection, this provides an opportunity to reconfigure trash service levels

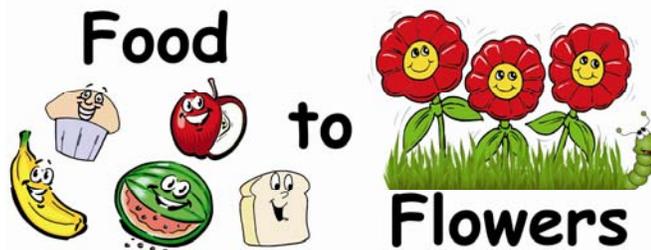
to reduce costs. Pilot programs in the Olympia school district diverted 75% of their kitchen and cafeteria waste by separating out organic materials.

Thurston County staff will assist with program set up, staff and student training, signs, indoor collection containers and publicity to let the community know how wonderful you are. LeMay will provide outdoor collection containers and help to figure out service levels best suited for the trash, recycling, and food scrap volumes.

Items that can be collected through this program include all types of food scraps (including bones, meat, and dairy), all food soiled papers (napkins, paper milk/juice/ice cream cartons, paper cups, pizza boxes, etc.) and all yard and plant waste (grass clippings, garden trimmings, leaves, nursery plants, etc.).

By composting this organic material schools may:

- Reduce the amount of garbage produced and lower trash hauling costs.
- Help make a valuable soil amendment that will be used throughout this region.
- Give students hands-on experience in composting and resource conservation.
- Lead by example and raise community awareness about composting and waste reduction.
- Create a more sustainable school that the whole community can be proud of.



Thurston County initiated the program to divert these useful materials from

the landfill. Organic materials are very recyclable, high in nutrient value, and don't need to be part of the waste stream. These collected organics are made into compost, so it is critical that there are no contaminants included, such as plastics or other non-compostable trash items. The materials go to Silver Springs Organics, the new commercial composting facility in Thurston County. This facility accepts a variety of organic materials and is available for school tours, just call 360-446-SOIL.

If you would like more information on the Food to Flowers program, please contact Terri Thomas of Thurston County Solid Waste at 360-754-2896 or [thomaste@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:thomaste@co.thurston.wa.us).

*“Pilot Programs in the Olympia school district diverted 75% of their kitchen and cafeteria waste by separating out organic materials.”*



## Integrated Pest Management Resources



*“There is increasing evidence that children are particularly vulnerable to harm from pesticides...”*



Who needs to be involved to prevent cockroaches from infesting your school? What is the appropriate balance between weeds on the playing field and use of herbicides? What about along the fence-line? What is the least-toxic method available and is it effective and affordable? Schools are under scrutiny from many perspectives; control of weeds and pests in school buildings and school grounds are no exception.

Integrated pest management (IPM) is recognized as being an effective, research based approach to pest control. IPM includes regular monitoring to detect problems, taking pest control actions only when necessary, choosing the most effective and lowest risk option, and taking steps to create long-term preventative solutions.

The IPM Institute of North America has developed IPM standards for schools. These practical checklists of IPM practices can help when deciding on weed or pest control methods. The standards can also provide a frame-

work when evaluating your school’s pest control practices and policies or communicating about them to interested people. Information about the school IPM standards are found at [www.ipminstitute.org/school/](http://www.ipminstitute.org/school/).

Parents, teachers, staff and others want to know more about the safety of products used in and around schools. There is increasing evidence that children are particularly vulnerable to harm from pesticides due in part to their incomplete development. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department’s Environmental Health staff is a great resource for staff, parents and other interested community members. As questions come in, one of our Environmental Health staff members may contact your maintenance staff to get more information on products you use, and any pesticide policies you have.

We have a wealth of information on pesticides and IPM, including sample school IPM policies. Thurston County adopted an IPM policy over ten years ago, which applies to

county-owned property such as parks, county buildings, and county roads. In the county’s policy, pesticides may only be used as part of an IPM prescription and after being reviewed and approved by the Health Department. Chemical hazards evaluated include: mobility, persistence, bioaccumulation, acute and chronic toxicity, inert ingredients, degradation products, and exposure risk. The Thurston County IPM Policy considers pesticides to have unacceptable hazards when they are: persistent and can bioaccumulate, known or suspected carcinogens, mutagens, or cause endocrine disruption. Over the last year we have been reviewing many pesticides, looking for low-hazard options, and are happy to share the results of our IPM prescriptions and pesticide reviews.

For more information about Thurston County’s resources call Jane Mountjoy-Venning, 360-754-4111, x7623, TDD 360-754-2933; e-mail: [venninj@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:venninj@co.thurston.wa.us)

## Clean Hands, Healthy People: Creating a School Environment that Promotes Good Hand Hygiene

Every year, more than 164 million school days are lost due to illness. This number could be reduced greatly if children and adults merely washed their hands properly and regularly. A study of 305 school children found that youngsters who washed their hands four times a day had 24% fewer sick days due to respiratory illness and 51% fewer days due to upset stomach. Teacher illness costs time and money and may have a negative affect on student learning. One study found that teacher illness-related absences averaged 5.3 days a year compared to an average of 4.5 days a year for students.

Most people learn about hand washing and basic hygiene habits in early childhood. However, research shows that most people also need reminders about the importance of clean hands and to wash them as often and thoroughly as they should. In one study, only 58% of female and 48% of male middle and high school students washed their hands after using the bathroom. Of these, only 33% of the females and 8% of the males used soap. In a

study of adults, about 33% didn't wash their hands after using the bathroom.

Here are a few suggestions to get your school started on creating an environment that promotes good hand hygiene:

- Remind students, or even better yet, make it part of the classroom routine, to take the time to wash hands after using the restroom, after playing outside and before eating.
- Check the hand washing facilities on a regular basis to make sure they are well stocked with soap and paper towels or that the air dryer is working properly.
- Post visual reminders about the importance of hand washing, when to wash and how to wash.
- Adults can set the example by washing hands properly and often.
- If soap and water are simply not available or

accessible, explore the installation of instant hand-sanitizer stations in bathrooms or other likely spots.

- Have the school nurse and/or health teacher give a lesson on hand cleaning. WSU Thurston County Extension can provide Germ City, an interactive hand washing activity that shows how effective good hand washing can be.

Visit these on-line resources for other ideas and activities:

[www.itsasnap.org](http://www.itsasnap.org)

[www.scrubclub.org](http://www.scrubclub.org)

[www.cdc.gov/cleanhands](http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands)

[www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org)

[www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

Zena Edwards is the Food Safety & Nutrition Faculty for Washington State University Thurston County Extension. She may be reached at [zena\\_edwards@wsu.edu](mailto:zena_edwards@wsu.edu) or 360-786-5445 x7916



*“A study of 305 school children found that youngsters who washed their hands four times a day had 24% fewer sick days due to respiratory illness and 51% fewer days due to upset stomach.”*





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[www.co.thurston.wa.us/health](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health)



## SUGGESTIONS?

If you have any information or school related issues you would like to see addressed in future issues of School Links please call 754-3355 extension 7392 or 7386,

E-mail:  
[peebled@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:peebled@co.thurston.wa.us)

or write to:  
Thurston County  
Environmental Health  
Division  
Attn: Dawn Peebles  
2000 Lakeridge Drive SW  
Olympia, WA 98502

## THURSTON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION

2000 Lakeridge Drive SW

Olympia, WA 98502

## School Programs – Lip Balm, Bingo, and Label Reading



Teens are a primary target for sale of personal care products, yet are not well equipped to discern a safe prod-

uct from one that may actually be hazardous to their health. Teens are also taking more responsibility for home, yard, and car care, and may be exposed to dangers from oven cleaner, pesticides, and auto products. Thurston County Environmental Health offers school presentations for middle and high school classes that are full of activities to engage students in learning important lessons on protecting themselves and the environment from common products.

**“Get Out of My Hair: Toxins in Personal Care”** presents health concerns, how to read labels, helpful websites, and safer

alternatives to products such as cosmetics, lotion, deodorant, and hair products. Students make an all-natural lip balm to take home.



**“Hazards on the Home-front”** is a class on how to read product labels for toxicity levels and proper use, storage, and disposal. Students play “Toxic-Free Bingo” and see first-hand whether less-toxic cleaners are effective by conducting an experiment on their desks.

Both classes are 50 minutes in length, and can be extended for longer classes. To schedule a presentation, contact Jennifer Johnson at 360-754-3355 x7631 or [johnsoj@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:johnsoj@co.thurston.wa.us).