

IMPACT



Kootenai County, 1000 W. Hubbard St., Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815; 208-446-1680; Fax: 208-446-1690

Children at the North Idaho Fair Petting Zoo Learn to Properly Wash Their Hands

The Situation

Outbreaks of *E. coli* O157 infections among children have been associated with petting zoos at farms, fairs, and festivals. In the spring and fall of 2000, 56 illnesses and 19 hospitalizations were reported among children visiting farms/petting zoos in Pennsylvania and Washington State. Of the 44 state and territorial public health departments responding to a national CDC survey in June 2000, none had laws to control exposure of humans to pathogens from interaction with farm animals during public events.



E. coli O157 infections cause an estimated 73,500 cases of illness, 2,000 hospitalizations, and 60 deaths each year in the United States.

For the past several years many children have enjoyed the petting zoo at the North Idaho Fair in Kootenai County. Hand-washing education was a key safety measure that needed to be included to ensure the safety of all petting zoo participants.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension and Panhandle Health District Medical Reserve Corp pooled their resources to educate petting zoo participants about proper hand-washing. The Medical Reserve Corp

supplied 40 volunteers to help educate fair participants. University of Idaho in Kootenai County supplied *Germ City*.

Germ City is a program/exhibit that teaches and motivates children and families about the importance of hand washing for good health and food safety. The *Germ City* exhibit is a 7' high x 7' long x 3' wide tent-like structure with a ultra-violet light inside. Children and adults apply a black light sensitive lotion to their hands and enter the *Germ City* and see pretend germs. After initial observation, participants wash their hands normally, re-visit *Germ City*, and assess their effectiveness.

UI Extension in Kootenai County also supplied volunteer tool kits, youth participant stickers, coloring pages, and parent brochures.

Program Outcomes

Germ City was set-up inside the petting zoo barn. *Germ City* taught 3,300 children and adults how to properly wash their hands. Planned behavior changes were tracked for ~15% of the 1,800 small children that entered *Germ City*. Each child was asked to choose a time that they will try to wash their hands more often. Results are as follows:

- 27% after using the restroom
- 25% before preparing or eating food
- 19% after playing with animals
- 15% after coughing and sneezing
- 13% after playing or working outside

The Future

University of Idaho Extension and the Medical Reserve Corp will collaborate again to offer *Germ City* at the 2006 North Idaho Fair.

For More Information

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