



FAQs: Hand Dryers

Drying hands the Eco-Healthy Way

Caregivers and the children they care for are washing their hands many, many times a day. And, that's what we want to keep kids healthy! However, with cleaning hands, comes the question of how best to dry them to ensure healthy practices while also being mindful of reducing waste. Read on to review best practices for drying hands while being environmentally friendly.

Are hand dryers better than paper towels?

Hand dryers have been marketed as the eco-friendly alternative to paper towels. They reduce waste, and save money because they last 7-10 years and eliminate the need to constantly purchase new paper towels. A [cost benefit analysis](#) showed that hand dryers pay for themselves in an average of 7 months, and the findings accounted for their energy use too!

What are the problems with hand dryers?

Unfortunately, hand dryers can be noisy (adding to unwanted noise pollution), ineffective at drying, and spread bacteria. High speed dryers work faster, but can [hurt children's ears](#). Low speed dryers require longer use time so most people don't fully dry their hands when using one (moisture spreads bacteria!). Therefore, more bacteria remains on people's hands when warm air dryers are used versus cool air dryers. Finally, powerful jet air dryers can [blast bacteria from poorly washed hands](#) into the air!

Purchasing a hand dryer

If you decide to purchase a hand dryer, you should attentively shop around to find the features best suited for your facility's needs. Though still noisy, high-speed dryers that use cool air are an option. Important features to look for include: antibacterial coatings (without the use of chemicals), automatic

dryers with infrared sensors, and HEPA filters that clean the air used for drying. There are also customizable hand dryers available, which encourage children to use hand dryers for an adequate amount of time by making it a fun experience (you can personalize the dryer with colorful prints or cartoons/animals). Setting a timer might also help children use the hand dryer for long enough to reduce bacteria effectively.

Drying hands with towels

Another eco-friendly alternative to paper towels are reusable cloth towels that are washed daily. You can greatly reduce costs and waste, by using small towels (wash clothes) for hand drying. The reusable aspect reduces waste and eliminates the need to constantly purchase paper towels. Reusable cloth towels effectively dry hands faster than an air dryer would, which reduces the risk of spreading bacteria via moisture. The friction from the towel also helps with removing bacteria, and there is no cross contamination risk like the jet air dryer that can disperse bacteria into the air. It is important that each child uses their own hand towel, to avoid the spreading of germs from one child to another. Offering hooks (i.e., a wooden accordion towel hanger) labeled with each child's name - allows children to use their own towel, while also teaching them their name recognition. Additionally, children take on the responsibility of caring for the tidiness of their environment by re-hanging their towels and picking up after themselves.

The downside to reusable cloth towels is increased water use since the towels need to be laundered daily. This must be done to ensure cleanliness because moist towels harbor bacteria. To reduce en-

ergy and water use, large laundry loads should be done - where towels can be combined with other items that need washing.

To learn more about preventing children's exposure to Noise Pollution, visit EHCC's Fact Sheet:

<https://cehn.org/our-work/eco-healthy-child-care/ehcc-factsheets/>

References:

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