

Project Title: Barriers and Opportunities to Use Hand Sanitizers among Ryerson University Students

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Objective: To understand the behavioral determinants of hand hygiene on our campus

Design: Qualitative study with three focus group discussions

Setting: Ryerson University Campus

Participants: Ryerson University students representing various programs

Results: All participants agreed that there are not enough hand sanitizer stations on campus and those that are existing need to be frequently maintained and fulfilled. Furthermore, they mentioned that the hand sanitizer dispensers have the same color as the walls/stands which carry them so they very often are not noticeable, and colors need to be contrasted. The consensus was that Ryerson needs an educational campaign about the importance of using hand sanitizers among the students. The common sense amongst students was to use alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) sanitizers over the alcohol-free ones. The trend is that the current crisis of COVID-19 does affect the hand hygiene practices of people in general, but unfortunately, the participants do not notice a real change over the campus.

Discussion/Conclusion: Many students in our study described the hand hygiene practices as a personal matter, with a noticeable bias to alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) method. Our study reported reduced hand hygiene adherence in association with the inconvenient distribution of hand sanitizer stations across the campus, as well as the inadequate maintenance for those stations where most participants reported that most of those stations are often empty. Study

participants equivalently reported being more cautious about hand hygiene in situations considered to be either physically dirty or “emotionally dirty,” that is, moments that they feel an object is dirty even though it would look not, like when using public transportation or during their existence on campus like when using tables, doorknobs, elevator buttons, etc. Our study documented the need for appropriate hand hygiene in all circumstances because students almost live on campus, where they use various equipment, deal with others, and eat as well.

To sum up, the results of this qualitative study propose several strategies that hand hygiene practices can be supported and improved. Participants highlighted the need for a persistent focus on the elimination of practical and logistical barriers to healthy practice. They suggested a continuous maintenance for the hand sanitizer dispensers and relocating the hand sanitizer stations in a more convenient manner, as well as the need for profession-specific ongoing education and feedback about hand hygiene practices.