

PRESS RELEASE

DepEd, partners reinforce handwashing practice in schools

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is entered into by the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP), and League of Provinces of the Philippines (LPP) facilitated by Fit for School, Inc. on October 15, Friday, in Bagong Ilog Elementary School, Pasig City to promote proper hygiene practices.

The MOU signing is part of the October 15 celebration of Global Handwashing Day as designated by the United Nations General Assembly to echo and reinforce the call for improved hygiene practices.

Studies have shown that most of the diseases that afflict schoolchildren are caused by hygiene problems. 67% of Filipino children have soil transmitted helminth infections while more than 82,000 Filipino children die every year due to hygiene-related infectious diseases.

“Many consider this situation normal or socially acceptable because they are not immediately life threatening. However, only little attention is given on its effect on the physical and mental development of children which directly affects their school attendance, school performance and ultimately quality of life. That is why in DepEd, with the help of our stakeholders, we always put the welfare of our students on top of our priority. We want to ensure that they are properly taken cared of and that there are facilities to provide them the protection they need,” said Education Chief Armin Luistro.

Recognizing that children are the most vulnerable members of civil society who need protection and support of all, DepEd, together with DOH, DSWD, LCP, and LPP pledged their commitment to strengthen the global campaign to practice handwashing with soap among the community, particularly in schools.

Luistro also expressed his thanks to major partners such as the German donor agency GTZ for supporting a health intervention program for Filipino children, Fit for School, Inc., United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and Procter and Gamble for helping the department carry out an initiative that will create a healthier community for Filipinos.

“With this MOU, we expect not only to increase the awareness of the community on the importance of a daily handwashing habit, but also to keep our children in schools healthy physically and mentally. Also, the department seeks more support from other stakeholders to invest in the education and health of the Filipino youth,” Luistro said.

One of the major points mentioned in the MOU is the use of schools and daycare centers as venues to institutionalize handwashing with soap as a daily habit for children.

Among the commitments of the department is to institutionalize handwashing as part of daily school life through issuance of administrative orders. It is also urged

to use schools as link to the community in the improvement of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities.

On the other hand, as the lead agency in promoting social development, DSWD will ensure that all Daycare centers have handwashing facilities as this should be one of the pre-requisites for their accreditation. It should also ensure that handwashing with soap is a part of daily Daycare center activity.

As the lead agency in public health, DOH will be in-charge of mainstreaming messages about handwashing with soap in its campaigns. It will also support the allocation of financial resources to facilitate handwashing with soap in all public elementary and government Daycare centers.

Moreover, local government units through the LCP and LPP will endorse school-based handwashing program to all its members. They will also serve as a forum for the advocacy of handwashing with soap among its executives. LCP and LPP shall lobby for budgetary allocation of the construction and or improvement of WASH facilities and procurement of soaps that will be used in public elementary schools, Daycare centers, public hospitals, and other public buildings.

With this collaboration, meeting the over-all objective of creating an environment in schools and Daycare settings that will be helpful to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is a step closer, especially the reduction of child mortality.

Aside from Luistro, DSWD Undersecretary Celia Yangco, DOH Assistant Secretary Paulyn Ubial, UNICEF Country Representative Vanessa Tobin, President and General Manager of Procter and Gamble Siddik Tetik, Pasig City Mayor Roberto Eusebio, Pasig City Congressman Roman Romulo, Pasig Schools Division Superintendents Florentina Lizano, and Bagong Ilog Captain Ferdinand Avis were also present in the event.

Meanwhile, pursuant to Presidential Proclamation No. 471 (September 22, 1994), October is considered as School Health Month. The theme of this year's celebration is: *"Intensification of Advocacy and Service in the Management of W.I.L.D. (Water Borne, Influenza, Leptospirosis and Dengue) Diseases."*

Based on DepEd Memorandum 433, series 2010, DepEd-HNC will conduct activities which include: School Children's Oral Health Awareness Week that will scale up the implementation of the Essential Health Care Program in the schools and reinforce the 7 o'clock toothbrushing habit among Grade I pupils; Delivery of Health and Nutrition Services to intensify DOH's 4S (search and destroy, self-protection measures, seek early consultation, and say "NO" to indiscriminate fogging), dengue prevention and control campaigns, and strengthen the Preventive Alert System in Schools (PASS); Environmental Sanitation and Improvement of Facilities which seeks to campaign for clean and safe schools promote repair, maintenance and construction of health facilities through *Brigada Eskwela Plus*; and Collaboration with other Agencies for Advocacy and Services that will establish coordination with government organizations and non-government organizations for referral and support services. **END**

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