**Hand Washing Report**
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## Introduction

In Vietnam, diarrhea is the second leading killer of children behind pneumonia.[1] One risk factor for diarrhea is not washing hands with soap. According to a 2006 study in Hanoi, Vietnam, children whose mothers washed their hands infrequently before feeding their children developed diarrhea more often than children whose mothers washed their hands frequently before feeding their children.[2] A systematic review published in 2010 highlighted a 48% reduction in diarrhea due to hand washing with soap.[3]

In addition to washing hands with soap, it is important to wash hands at critical times such as after using the bathroom or before eating. In Vietnam, one of the major problems with effective hand washing is a lack of hand washing at critical times.[4] A 2007 study in Vietnam reported a lack of hand washing at critical times among mothers with children under five-years-old who had a low household income. Among these mothers, 14% washed their hands with soap after cleaning a child, 23% washed their hands with soap after cleaning a child's stool and 5% washed their hands with soap before feeding a child. In addition, the authors highlighted that about half of the participants responded that they wash their hands with only water after using the toilet (51%).[5]

Given the current hand washing situation in Vietnam, the hand washing behavior of mothers is an important factor for a child's health. To explore Vietnamese mothers' hand washing, an interview guideline was drafted that investigated the knowledge, attitude and behavior of hand washing among mothers. In addition to the mother's behavior, the hand washing behavior of the child was also examined.

## Methods

Before conducting the interviews, a short qualitative interview guideline was created. Ten interviews were conducted of mothers of sick children. The children were all admitted to the pediatric ward of the Hue University Hospital. Each of the interviews lasted between ten and twenty minutes. The interviews were conducted on the 12th and 17th of July 2013 and were carried out with translation assistance from a research assistant of the International Collaborative Centre for Community Health Research (ICCCHR).

## Results

The interview participants consisted of ten mothers aged 22-37. All the mothers were of Kinh ethnicity. Half the mothers had completed primary school, while the other half had completed secondary school. Four of the mothers stated

that they did not have a religion, while four affiliated with Buddhism and two were Christian.

The interview participants each had one sick child in the hospital. Eight of the children were less than two-years-old. The remaining two children were eight and three-and-one-half years old. The eight-year-old was the only child in school. Eight of the children were male and two were female. Seven children were from rural locations, while two lived in suburban residences and one lived in an urban area. The children suffered from a variety of symptoms. Four of the mothers reported that their child had a fever, three reported diarrhea and four reported vomiting. Generally, the mother did not know what caused their child's illness.

The mothers were asked when they wash their hands. Half of the women responded that they wash their hands after going to the bathroom and before preparing their child's food. The next most common responses for when mothers washed their hands were before going to a meal, when they wake up, when their hands are visibly dirty, and before going to bed. The mothers were then questioned about how they washed their hands. Six of the ten participants explained that they always used soap and water while four described that they sometimes only used water and sometimes used soap. After explaining how they washed their hands, the women were asked why they wash their hands. Five of the women mentioned that washing their hands removes germs and two noted that they wash their hands to make sure that their hands are clean.

Next, the women were asked about hand washing at their home. Seven of the women explained that they had a hand washing station. One of the woman highlighted that it was difficult to access the area where she washed her hands but the rest of the participants said that hand washing was easy. When the mothers were asked about access to soap, three women explained that it was difficult to access soap when they washed their hands because it was not kept in the same area where they wash their hands. When asked if the general task of hand washing was difficult, only one mother said it was difficult.

After discussing the practice of hand washing, the mothers were asked about the importance and benefits of it. All the mothers agreed that hand washing was important. Seven of the ten mothers mentioned that hand washing was important because it protects against germs. When asked about the benefits of hand washing, the most common benefit cited was that it protects against disease. Three mothers explained that it helps them avoid germs and provides good hygiene for the baby.

After discussing their own hand washing, the women were asked about washing their baby or child's hands. The most common times mothers washed their hands were in the morning, before they go to sleep and when they are visibly dirty. The most common reason mothers have for washing their child's hands was that germs were on the hands. Next, the mothers were asked to explain how they wash the child or baby's hands. Four of the ten mothers used special baby soap every time they washed their child's hands, two mothers used regular soap, two sometimes used soap and sometimes used plain water and two only used plain water. Most of the mothers explained that washing their child's hands was easy.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, there seems to be a lack of hand washing at critical times for both the mother and child, which is supported by previous research. Due to the small sample size, this research is explorative and can provide guidance for future research. Further research is needed to understand why there is a general lack of hand washing at critical times. In addition to the lack of hand washing at critical times, this research also indicates a need for more research into the barriers to consistent use of soap when washing hands.

**References**

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