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Wash your hands for better grades

Study shows that children's
unhygienic practices directly impact
their performance in school

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HEALTHY CHILDHOOD: Regular attendance and good marks go hand-in-hand.
PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

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If you thought the number of hours devoted to studies is the only factor influencing your child's academic performance, think again.

A recent study, involving 500 parents from Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, reveals that a range of behavioural factors, most notably unhygienic practices, can also have a significant impact on a child's academic performance.

Child Health Intelligence and Performance (CHIP) study, conducted by the Indian Medical Academy, divided the students surveyed into two groups - those who scored above 80 per cent marks and had more than 80 per cent attendance (group A) and those who scored below 80 per cent and had less than 80 per cent attendance (group B). Regular attendance and good percentages of marks, it has been observed, go hand in hand.

The objective of the study was to compare and contrast the behavioural factors (including basic hygiene, physical activity, sleep duration, eating habits, regular hand washing, daily bathing and playing outdoors) between both the groups and check whether or not these factors affect academic performance and cognitive development of a child.

It was found that 68 per cent of students in group A followed basic hygiene practices compared with only 19 per cent in group B who did so. The study also found a correlation between hygiene habits and sickness absenteeism i.e. students who had poor hygiene fell sick more often and therefore had poor

attendance, which in turn results in growth and cognitive impairments," said Dr. Sanjeev Bajori, senior paediatrician, CEO and Dean, Radiant Life Care, New Delhi and a member of Indian Medical Academy.

The study also revealed that those group B students who had an attendance of less than 80 per cent, sickness was the main reason for absence from school (in 69 per cent of the cases). In comparison, family engagement was the leading cause of absenteeism in group A students, accounting for 43 per cent of the students with an attendance above 80 per cent.

The study brought to light some other interesting facts as well. It was found that in group A, 87 per cent students ate healthy food, 88 per cent had daily, and 67 per cent washed their hands regularly. In contrast, in group B, only 18 per cent ate healthy, 53 per cent bathed daily and 37 per cent practiced hand wash regularly.

The figures bring out the correlation between good hygiene practices and academic performance of students. Experts are unanimous that good hygiene behaviour in students helps reduce the risk of diarrhoea-like diseases which, in turn, contributes to improving school attendance and academic performance of a child.

Apart from sickness absenteeism and hygiene practices, CHIP study also sought to compare other behaviour practices in students of both the groups.

It was found that in group B, only 43 per cent students studied more than 3 hours a day, 39 per cent slept less than 7 hours a day and 64 per cent ate in the school canteen