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Title

The New Back-to-School Basics: COVID-19 Hygiene Education for Elementary Students

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Child and adolescent health

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic- with undulating statistics of new cases and deaths and with schools set to reopen in the fall of 2020 after a long hiatus- the objective was to address the needs and methods of preparing children for a safe return to school. Objective: To educate 1st – 5th grade elementary school children about proper health and safety precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Study Design and Setting: Three monthly virtual sessions via zoom were implemented with focuses on hygiene, physical activity, and healthy coping mechanisms during a pandemic. The hygiene lecture included interactive demonstrations on handwashing, coughing/sneezing precautions, and appropriate mask-wearing behavior. During the coping mechanisms session, children were asked to use art or free text to answer the question “How has COVID-19 changed my feelings?” The physical activity session discussed safe ways for children to stay active during the pandemic. Both quantitative (pre and post-knowledge assessment quizzes) and qualitative (free text, drawings) data were collected through electronic surveys. Quizzes were designed for the appropriate grade level and used a combination of multiple choice, free text, checkboxes, and pictures to address common themes. Population studied and Intervention: School-aged children (1st-5th grade) at the Raindrop Foundation of San Antonio participated in educational sessions about maintaining proper COVID-19 hygiene. Outcome Measures and Results: Final results show six 1st - 2nd graders and nine 3rd – 5th graders consistently participated in the project. The children involved could identify proper mask-wearing etiquette, safe coughing habits, and when and how to wash their hands. Emotions reported were both positive (ex. happy) and negative (ex. Sad, bored). Reported activities were indoor electronic games and work. Children reported missing friends and going to parks. Conclusions: These educational sessions were organized to teach children safe practices for their return to school, develop coping skills, and also help them adapt to physical activity while maintaining social distancing. Participant 1st - 5th graders answered most questions correctly and displayed the basics of COVID-19 safety knowledge. The children surveyed are experiencing mixed emotions during the pandemic due to feelings of social isolation.