

A Practitioner's Guide to OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING HAND DRYING & THE PLANET

Help! – How do we dry hands, kill germs and save the planet?



Hand drying is often overlooked when it comes to hand hygiene. You have your handwashing stations set up, you know where the water is coming from and where the waste water is going, you know how to do the [Baltic Street Handwashing Dance](#) (or one of your own). You are good to go! Or are you? Cleanliness of hands after washing is a priority, so how important is **hand drying**, in achieving clean hands? The transmission of bacteria is more likely to occur from wet skin than from dry

skin; therefore, the proper drying of hands after washing is critical to maintaining clean hands.

Things to Consider

The planet. How the towels paper or cloth are produced, how much methane is used, how many trees are destroyed, how do we get rid of the waste?

Germs, bugs and bacteria. How much water do they absorb? How many bugs and germs are removed (are the children **actually** drying hands or simply giving them a token 'wipe'?) How do we store or dispose of them?

Washing. Staff time, machine efficiency, laundry cleaning products and their



cost/impact on the environment, logistics of getting these off and onto the site, the use of electricity, storage of clean and dirty towels.

Cost. How much does each option cost, what is the environmental cost, what is the opportunity cost? (the cost of choosing one option over another).

Supply and demand. During times of increased use (e.g. Covid-19) you may find supplies of paper towels hard to find.

Single Use 'Unpaper' Towels

The [World Health Organisation](#) simply states that towels should be single use. Since a **cloth towel** can be used multiple times, it could save you money over **paper towels** that regularly need to be purchased and restocked, providing you wash with the environment in mind. Additionally, because you can reuse hand **towels**, many consider them to be more environmentally friendly than their **paper** cousins.

Single Use Paper Towels

This is one of the most effective ways of removing water from hands and for that reason is used in medical and health care settings. However, ask yourself, 'is every paper towel the same?' No. Some are made from recycled paper, others part recycled and some are from 'new' paper. All come from trees. However, if paper towels are 100% recycled, recyclable, and your organisation enforces a strict recycling policy that doesn't allow any of the towels to go to the landfill, this can become much less of an issue.

Useful Links

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/infection-prevention-and-control-in-childcare-settings-day-care-and-childminding-settings/>

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/sbar-hygiene-requirements-in-outdoor-nurseries-in-scotland/>

<https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-and-handwashing-research-shows-proper-hand-drying-is-also-vital-132905>

<https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/content/carbon-metric-infographic>

<https://www.ace-tex.com/585/blog/paper-vs-cloth-greenest-options/>