

Over half a million secondary school children have not drunk during school in order to avoid having to use the toilets

New research commissioned by Essity, a leading hygiene and health organisation, has found that secondary and primary school pupils are risking their health and jeopardising their education, as a result of adopting unhealthy behaviours aimed at avoiding having to use 'dirty and unsafe' school toilets.

The research, conducted by YouGov on 1,522, 11-16-year-old school pupils across Britain, found:

- Over one in five (22%) of school children surveyed – equivalent to 654,072* – have avoided drinking during school in order to avoid having to use the toilets
- Almost one in ten (9%) of school children surveyed have avoided eating during the school day to avoid having to use the toilets
- Of those pupils who avoid eating or drinking, almost one in four (23%) do it at least once a day

Of the pupils who avoid using school toilets, 52% said this is because the toilets are dirty, while 19% described them as unsafe, 17% as faulty and 12% said they lacked toilet roll or handwash.

Children appear to be adopting such habits at an early age too, with research by Essity identifying that 73% of primary school teachers are aware of children not wanting to use the school toilets during the day, with one in ten aware of children not eating or drinking enough in order to avoid having to go. Half of Key Stage One teachers said they had seen children wet or soil themselves rather than use the toilet.

As a result of not drinking or eating during the school day, pupils are reporting health problems and struggling to concentrate in class, with survey findings revealing:

- Over a third (34%) of school pupils aged 11-16 who avoid drinking or eating said they have suffered headaches as a result
- 31% said they have struggled to concentrate
- 20% said they were more easily annoyed as a result

The research marks the latest phase of the School Hygiene Essentials Initiative, which was launched by Essity in 2018 to address hygiene issues in schools, with the aim of improving educational and health outcomes for pupils. The initiative is made up of a collective of health and hygiene experts, including Essity, the School and Public Health Nurses Association (SAPHNA), National Association for

Primary Education (NAPE), ERIC (the children's bowel and bladder charity) and the Paediatric Continence Forum (PCF).

Kevin Starr, UK managing director at Essity, says: "While we expected to find some evidence of pupils not drinking or eating in order to avoid using school toilets, we were shocked by the sheer scale of the problem and how it transcends both primary and secondary schools.

"The fact that almost a quarter of school pupils aged 11-16 are choosing not to drink during the school day in order to avoid using school toilets highlights a real problem that needs addressing urgently. Schools where toilets are not properly maintained or dirty risk undermining all the brilliant work that is going on in the classroom – and that can't be allowed to happen.

"Through the School Hygiene Essentials Initiative, we're committed to drawing on our collective expertise to help schools to keep their toilets clean and fit for use throughout the day through simple, easily implementable measures that will save them money and, most importantly, improve educational and health outcomes for pupils."

Cari, a 12-year-old school pupil spoke of her experience of avoiding drinking at school: "I don't drink as much when I'm in school, I just wait until I get home. I never use the toilets at school unless I really have to as I'm worried that people will be able to hear me go to the toilet and will say something. If I do have to go, I make sure that I am as quiet as possible but that doesn't always work. It is something that I worry about a lot and would prefer to just wait until I get home to go the toilet."

The research was met with real concern by Sharon White, CEO, School and Public Health Nurses Association, who said: "The School and Public Health Nurses Association is really concerned to hear the impact that poor and inadequate toilet facilities are having on children and young people's health and well-being.

"This report demonstrates that avoiding toileting is taking its toll on their daily eating and drinking habits while at school. This has potential to result in insufficient calorie and fluid intake which, in turn, can lead to dehydration, constipation, urine infections, fainting, dizziness, loss of concentration, attendance and attainment. Mental health can also be negatively affected resulting in low self-esteem, anxiety and low mood. The implications of this are far reaching, wholly unacceptable and, indeed, avoidable."

Peter Cansell, national executive information officer at the National Association of Primary Education, commented: "Children deserve to be educated in a pleasant, comfortable and healthy environment for learning. Being confident about using their school toilets plays an important part in this and this research highlights that work still needs to be done."

To help schools to ensure that toilets remain fit for use and hygienic throughout the school day, the School Hygiene Essentials Initiative has collated a series of educational resources and advice to help schools and children improve hygiene standards within toilets and understand the importance of good hygiene behaviours.

Further information and links to resources helping schools to ensure toilets are well maintained and clean can be found at <https://schoolhygieneessentials.co.uk/solution.html>.

Each year, Essity donates essential items including toilet rolls to help make a positive difference; In 2018, the company donated over 70,000 toilet rolls.

ENDS

Notes to editors

About Essity

Essity is a leading global hygiene and health company dedicated to improving well-being through products and services, essentials for everyday life. The name Essity stems from the words essentials and necessities. Our sustainable business model creates value for people and nature. Sales are conducted in approximately 150 countries under the leading global brands TENA and Tork, and other strong brands, such as JOBST, Leukoplast, Libero, Libresse, Lotus, Nosotras, Saba, Tempo, Vinda and Zewa. Essity has about 47,000 employees and net sales in 2018 amounted to approximately SEK 118.5bn (EUR 11.6bn). The headquarters is located in Stockholm, Sweden, and the company is listed on Nasdaq Stockholm.

In the UK and Republic of Ireland, Essity has around 1,500 employees across 11 sites, including six tissue production mills. Its regional brands include Bodyform, Cushelle, Velvet and Plenty. For more information visit www.essity.co.uk

The research

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1522 children aged 11-16. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th - 26th March 2019. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB children (aged 11 - 16).

The calculations

- 22% of 11-16 year olds not drinking: 22% of 2,973,057 = 654,072 11-16 year olds in state-funded secondary schools (Jan, 2018) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2018>

For more information on the School Hygiene Essentials Initiative, visit:
schoolhygieneessentialsinitiative.co.uk