

Using a behaviourally informed poster to improve hand washing in homes

Issue: The WHO (2020) has advised that “One of the most important contributions we can make to slowing down transmission of COVID-19 and keeping ourselves and our communities safe is to wash our hands.” Washing hands with soap and water reduces the amounts of all types of germs on hands. Across the OECD, supporting good hand hygiene is now a key component of mitigation strategies that aim to slow the transmission of COVID-19 (OECD, 2020).

However, hand washing is a behaviour for which people show an intention-behaviour gap. Self-report (Dean et al., 2017) and observational (Vaganay et al., forthcoming) studies show that people commonly do not adhere to recommended hand washing behaviours. Non-adherence includes not washing hands, not using soap when washing with water, not washing for long enough, not drying hands after washing, or not drying for long enough.

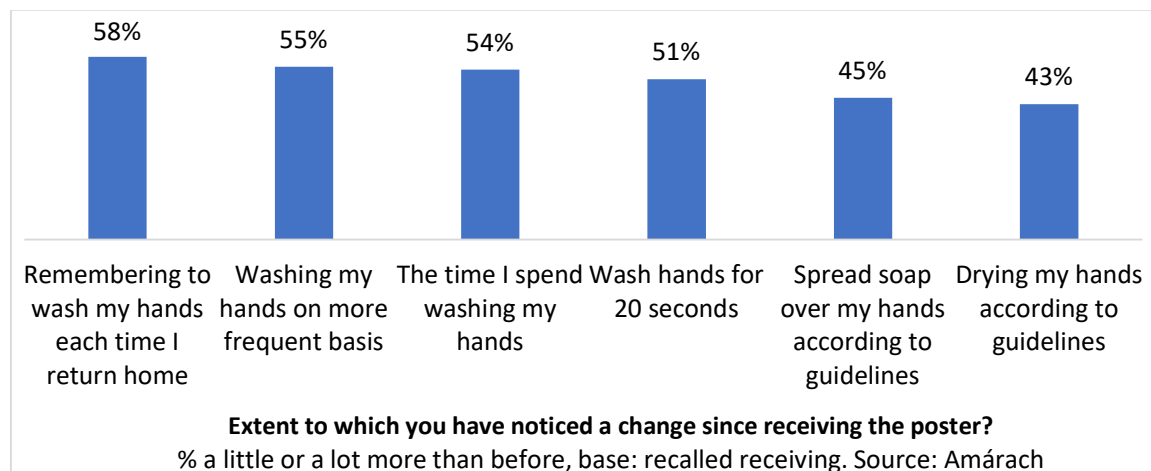
Response: A survey in the Republic of Ireland identified scope for improvement in hand washing in homes. The Department (Ministry) of Health designed a behaviourally informed hand washing poster and issued it to all households in April 2020.

The poster content and design were informed by international guidance (CDC and ECDC) and insights from a literature review (Murphy, 2020). The final design resulted from a collaboration between the Research Services and Policy Unit, and the Communications Unit in the Department.

The poster focuses on capability (how to) as it stresses the importance of using soap and water, and shows the steps and time involved. It also targets motivation, with an emphasis on the emotions of threat and disgust (“Kill the virus”) and affiliation (“To protect you and others” and “Save lives”).



Impact: More than half of respondents in a follow-up survey recalled receiving the poster (59%) and most of these noticed improvements in their hand washing since receiving the poster see below.



Citation: Please cite as: Murphy, R., & Mooney, R., (2020). *A brief case study on using a behaviourally informed poster to improve hand washing in homes*, Research Services and Policy Unit, Department of Health.

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Amárach, Public Opinion Tracker for Department of Health, 27th April 2020



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Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service